Forty Gospel Homilies

Monastic Studies Series

6

This series contains titles from monastic and ascetical writers throughout the history of monasticism.

Forty Gospel Homilies

By

Gregory the Great

Translated by

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gorgias press
2009

Gorgias Press LLC, 180 Centennial Ave., Piscataway, NJ, 08854, USA

www.gorgiaspress.com

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Originally published in 1990

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2009

ISBN 978-1-60724-147-8

This volume is the book of the same title published by Cistercian Publications, 1990.

Printed in the United States of America

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introduction

AFTER THE INTELLECTUAL CONTROVERSIES of the past four and a half centuries and more, the restored interest in religion today has concerned itself mainly with a more personal experience of what it means to know and be drawn up into contact with the divine. It is felt that an intimate relation with what we think of as God is more primitive and authentic than an exact knowledge of what constitutes religious dogma. But overemphasis on either doctrinal formulations concerning other-worldly realities or human involvement in their implications is fraught with tendencies toward extremism. To maintain a balanced attitude to both is something that is not only extremely difficult but is also of the utmost importance. This is what Pope St. Gregory the Great (c. 540-604) manages to achieve with outstanding success in all his writings, but especially in his homilies or sermons on certain of the Gospel passages which he preached mainly during the early years of his pontificate (591-92).

The allegorical method of interpreting the sacred scriptures had to a great extent supplanted the literal or historical investigation of their exact meaning by the time that Gregory preached and wrote during the latter part of the sixth and early seventh centuries. However, Gregory frequently resorts to geographical, scientific and philological data in explaining the sense of holy writ. And he is both practical in insisting on the usefulness of the Word of God as a guide for everyday actions and persistent in his statements about its being the revealed directive of human affairs. In fact, one might say that in many instances Gregory is overly exacting in looking for a fundamentalist meaning for the biblical text. But like many of his predecessors and contemporaries he is also given to expounding the import of a particular passage, especially of the New Testament, by referring to a verbal or mental resemblance to another part of either the Old or New Testament. This is the basis of allegorical interpretation—explaining one statement or place or event in the scriptures by alluding to a suggestive or similar account or name or happening of an earlier instance. One finds this process already occurring in the New Testament itself, e.g., 1 Co 10:1-4, Ga 4:22-26, Eph 5:29-32.

This manner of elucidating the meaning of the significance of the bible is not based simply on a fanciful indulgence of a theologian who is looking for a new and different approach to the sacred text, but it serves as a means of making it more meaningful for the individual. Religion is not merely a quest for penetrating into what is mysterious in life. It entails a personal engagement with what is enigmatic and arcane as well as providing a code of moral conduct. During recent years it has come to be fashionably accepted that this can be attained by practicing certain mental or physical techniques—a conscious or subconscious rejection of attempting to penetrate the divine by an intellectual construction of a system of thought that would reveal and unveil what is hidden. Allied to this is the feeling of having had a personal encounter with God or Jesus or some other supernatural power. As Gregory so abundantly makes clear, this sort of search for divine truth is illusory if it is not accompanied by a rejection of all that is evil and a continuous search for what is good, or God himself. Repentance or sorrow for having done what is sinful must be followed by an unending striving for perfection and seeking for the joy of participating in eternal goodness, or again, God himself. It does not reject a search for the truth or repudiate an experience on the part of the individual with God or the divine, but it does insist upon prayer and meditation or reflection on the Word of God, coupled with a strenuous and serious effort to lead a good life.

Contemplation—or 'attentive regard', as I would have preferred to translate the Latin word *contemplatio* in Gregory—was the aim of those earliest Christian ascetics whom we call monks. It continues today to engage the interest and endeavor of those who have become increasingly disillusioned with trying to find happiness in material pleasures or possessions. It is not a form of escapism but an attempt to achieve a mystical, intuitive, experiential perception of the divine while one is still held bound by earthly and bodily ties. That Gregory himself reached the heights of mystical prayer and conceived of it as the ultimate aim of human existence cannot be denied. Everything that he thought or spoke or wrote leads to this goal. It is why he remains an effective guide for those who seek a religion that is meaningful for their lives. Not everyone can attain the summit which he did; all can aspire to some lesser achievement on the journey towards God if they follow his teaching and example.

There is no modern critical edition of his forty Gospel homilies, and for the foreseeable future one must rely on the Maurist text reprinted in volume seventy-six of Migne's *Patrologia Latina*. For this English translation, therefore, we have created an interim critical edition based primarily on three early manuscript: one at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, England, no. 69, of the eighth century, written probably in the south of England, another in the Archivo Capitular de la Catedral de Barcelona, Spain, no. 120, also of the eighth century, and a third presently in the Bibliothèque Nationale of Paris, no. 12254 of the medieval Latin manuscripts, and dating from the ninth century. The first two of these contain only the final twenty homilies, those numbered 21-40; the last has all forty of the homilies. This would seem to indicate that originally the manuscript copies of the homilies were in two separate volumes or codices and only combined into one volume by the copyists of the Carolingian period of the ninth century. In the Migne edition, the first twenty homilies are arranged in a random manner, with hardly any of the surviving manuscript copies having the same order of the homilies. By way of contrast, the second set of the homilies, numbers 21-40, are fairly well organized in a liturgical sequence, beginning with Easter and proceeding through the summer and autumn seasons. Hence it did not seem unreasonable to rearrange the first twenty homilies of what was possibly the first volume of the homilies in a similar liturgical order, beginning with Migne's homily 3, preached on the feast day of

Saint Felicity, November 23, and going on through Lent, with the final three homilies of this first book being of uncertain classification. The reasons which have been selected for the order of the twenty homilies in the first book have been given in the notes at the end of each of these homilies. The last twenty homilies, those comprising the second book, numbers 21-40, appear to be pretty well in an acceptable liturgical sequence and so have been left in the order that they are given in Migne.

Another means of establishing the original text as written down by Gregory's secretary or amanuensis is the manifold quotations from Gregory's homilies to be found in the various works of the Venerable Bede. Therefore reference has been made in the notes also to these often verbatim passages from Gregory's Gospel homilies which have come down to us in the writings of Bede. Bede would appear to have had available to him, as far as homilies 21-40 are concerned, a text similar to the English copy of Gregory's homilies represented in the Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, codex 69. The textual differences between it and the eighth-century Barcelona codex 120 are however minimal. A further reason for giving in the notes the passages from Gregory's homilies which Bede incorporated into his own writings is that this indicates the portions of Gregory's thought that were particularly influential in monastic circles during the middle ages and that were passed on not only directly through his works but also indirectly through the scriptural commentaries of Bede. No attempt has been made to identify all the sources from earlier authors which Gregory may have used. There are a number of references given in the notes to some of the more obvious borrowings that Gregory made from the works of previous writers.

D.H.

Editor's Note

The Board of Editors of Cistercian Publications express their appreciation to Brother John Leinenweber OSB, for his invaluable editorial help in preparing this manuscript for publication.

homily 1

And while he was still talking to the people, his mother and his kinsmen stood outside, asking to speak to him. But he answered and said to the one who told him: Who is my mother, and who are my brothers? And he stretched out his hand toward his disciples and said, Here is my mother; here are my brothers. Whoever does the will of my father who is in heaven, he is my brother and sister and mother.

(Matthew 12:46-50)[1*]

THE READING FROM THE HOLY GOSPEL, dearly beloved, is brief but heavy with many weighty mysteries. Jesus, our Creator and Redeemer, pretends not to know his mother. He indicates that he has a mother, and relatives, not through physical relationship but through spiritual affinity. He says, *Who is my mother, and who are my brothers? Whoever does the will of my father who is in heaven, he is my brother and sister and mother.* What does he signify to us by these words but that he gathers together many who obey his orders from heathenism, but does not acknowledge the Jewish race from which he was born? So too, when he does not recognize, so to speak, his mother, she is said to be standing outside. Its Author does not acknowledge the synagogue because when it clung to the observance of the Law it did away with its spiritual understanding and established itself outside, guarding the letter.

[2*]While it is not surprising that someone who does the will of the Father is said to be sister and brother of the Lord, since both sexes are gathered into the faith, it is very surprising that such a person is called 'mother' as well. He condescended to call the faithful disciples 'brothers' when he said, *Go, tell my brothers...*[1] We must ask how someone who could become the Lord's brother by coming to the faith can

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[1] Mt 28:10

[1*] Notes marked with an asterisk are found at the end of each Homily—ed.

also be his mother? We should know that a person who is Christ's brother and sister through his belief becomes his mother by preaching. He brings forth, as it were, the Lord Jesus, whom he introduces into the heart of the person listening; he becomes his mother, if through his words the love of the Lord is produced in his neighbor's heart.[3]*

As an apt demonstration of this fact, there is blessed Felicity, whose heavenly birthday we are commemorating today. By believing she became Christ's servant; by preaching, she became Christ's mother. We read in the more reliable accounts of her deeds that she feared leaving her seven sons alive after her in the flesh, just as physical parents usually fear that their children may die first. When caught up in the sufferings of the persecution, she strengthened her sons' hearts in love of their homeland above by preaching. She gave birth in the spirit to those to whom she had given physical birth, so that by preaching she might bring forth to God those whom in the flesh she had brought forth to the world.

Consider, dearly beloved, the manly heart in the woman's body! She stood up to death unperturbed; she was afraid that she would lose the light of truth in her sons if she were not made childless. Should I call this woman a martyr? She was more than a martyr! When the Lord spoke of John he asked, *What did you go out into the desert to see: a prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet.*[2] When John himself was asked, he answered, *I am not*[3] a prophet. He who knew that he was more than a prophet said he was not a prophet. He is said to be more than a prophet because it is a prophet's task to foretell things to come, not to point them out as well. John is more than a prophet because with his finger he pointed to the one he spoke of.[4]*

And so I would say that this woman was not a martyr but more than a martyr. She sent seven pledges to the kingdom ahead of her, and died that often ahead of her own death. She was the first to come to the torment but the

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2. Mt 11:9 3. Jn 1:21

eighth to come through it. Afflicted but imperturbable, the mother observed the death of her sons. To nature's grief she joined the joy of hope. She feared for them when they were alive, she rejoiced with them as they died. She wished to leave none of them behind her, for fear that if any of them survived her she would not have him as her companion hereafter.

None of you, dearly beloved, should think that little natural feeling gripped her heart while her sons were dying. She could not observe without grieving the deaths of the sons she knew to be her own flesh and blood. But there was an inner force of love that overcame her natural grief. Peter, who was also to suffer, was told, *When you are old, you will stretch out your hands and another will gird you and lead you where you do not wish to go.*[4] Peter could not have suffered for Christ had he been utterly unwilling. By the power of the Spirit he loved the martyrdom which by the weakness of the flesh he did not will. While he feared the sufferings in his body, in his spirit he exulted over the glory. So it came about that he willed the torment of martyrdom even as he was unwilling. We too take a bitter potion to purge ourselves when we seek the pleasure of good health; the bitterness in the drink is displeasing, but the good health the bitterness is to restore is pleasing. According to the flesh Felicity loved her sons, but because of her love of her heavenly homeland she willed that those whom she loved die in her presence. She felt their wounds, but she took courage in their going ahead of her to the kingdom.

Rightly therefore would I call more than a martyr this woman who was put to death in her sons by her own desire, and while she was achieving this manifold martyrdom won the palm of martyrdom itself. We hear that it was the custom among the ancients for someone who became a consul to occupy his place or rank according to the time when he took office; but, if anyone subsequently became consul, and this not for the first but perhaps for the second or third time, he would outrank those who were consuls only for the first time. Blessed Felicity outranked other martyrs for having died so often for Christ in the sons who preceded her in death. For love of him her own death did not alone suffice.

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[4] Jn 21:18

Let us consider this woman, dearly beloved. Let us consider ourselves and what in comparison with her will be thought of us, who in body are men. We often propose some good actions to be achieved, but if someone mocks us, uttering trivial remarks against, us, we are immediately turned back from our intention to act and retreat in confusion. Notice how frequently words cause us to draw back from a good work, while not even torture could sway Felicity from her holy intention. We are stopped by the breath of someone who speaks ill of us; she struck out for the kingdom even by the sword, and thought nothing of what stood in her way. We are unwilling to give away even our excess belongings at the Lord's command; she not only handed all her possessions over to God but even gave her own flesh for his sake. When we lose our children by an act of divine providence we grieve inconsolably; she would have wept for them as dead if she had not offered them up. When our severe Judge comes for the dreadful examination what shall we men say at seeing this woman's glory? What excuse will men have for the weakness of their hearts when we see this woman who overcame her sex as well as the world?

Dearly beloved, let us follow the strict rough way of our Redeemer.[5] By the practice of virtues it has been made so smooth that it is pleasant for women to walk on! Let us disregard all present things: whatever can pass away is worth nothing, and it is shameful to love what is certain to perish quickly. Let us not be overcome by love of earthly things, nor inflated by pride, nor torn apart by anger, nor defiled by dissipation, nor devoured by envy. Our Redeemer, dearly beloved, died out of love for us; let us learn to conquer ourselves out of love for him. If we do it perfectly we not only escape impending punishments but are rewarded with glory in common with the martyrs. This is not a time of persecution, yet our peace also has its martyrdom. Even if we do not submit our necks to the metal sword, still we are putting to death the carnal desires in our hears with a spiritual sword.

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[5] Is 40:4

NOTES

1. This homily is given in Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, 76:1086, as homily 3 of Book 1. But, as was stated in the Introduction, since the homilies in this first Book appear to be arranged in no particular order, it is here given first because it was delivered on the feast of Saint Felicity which occurs in the Roman martyrology on November 23. Legend made Felicity, an early Roman martyr, the mother of seven sons who were put to death for their faith. Why the feast of the seven brothers was long noted in the martyrology for July 10 is something that has never been satisfactorily explained.
2. This paragraph is quoted verbatim by Bede in his *Commentary on Mark* (CC 120: 479, 1629/39).
3. A thought similarly expressed by Saint Augustine in his treatise, *On Holy Virginity* (*CSEL* 41:239, 4/18), and in one of his *Sermons* (ed. Morin, *Miscellanea Agostiniana* I: 163, 19 - 164, 15).
4. Gregory uses this same thought, that John the Baptist was more than a prophet because he was able to point to the one he foretold, in homily 5.

homily 2

And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon, called Peter, and Andrew, his brother, casting a net into the sea. And he said to them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And immediately they left their nets and followed him. And going on yet further, he saw two other brothers, James, the son of Zebedee, and John, his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets. And he called them. And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him.

(Matthew 4:18-22)[1]*

You have heard, dearly beloved, that at a single command Peter and Andrew left their nets and followed the Redeemer. They had at this time seen him perform no miracles, they had heard nothing from him about eternal retribution: and yet at a single command from the Lord they forgot everything they seemed to possess. How many of his miracles do we see? How much suffering do we endure? How many harsh warnings threaten us? And yet we refuse to follow him when he calls. He who counsels us about conversion is already seated in heaven; he has already subjected the necks of the Gentiles to the yoke of faith; he has already laid low the world's glory; in its mounting ruins he already declares the approaching day of his strict judgment: and yet our proud hearts do not desire willingly to abandon what they lose daily, whether they will or not. Dearly beloved, what are we going to say at his judgment, we who are not turned away from love of the present world by commands nor corrected by buffeting?

But someone may say in his silent thoughts, 'What, and how much, did they give up at the Lord's command, these two fisherman who had almost nothing?' But in this, dearly beloved, we must weigh up the natural feeling rather than the amount. Someone who has kept back nothing for himself has left much behind; someone who has abandoned everything, no matter how little it is, has left much behind. Surely we hold on to what we have with love, and what we do not have we long for and seek to possess? Peter and Andrew gave up much when along with their possessions they renounced even their craving to possess. As much is given up by those following them, then, as those not following them can crave.

No one should say to himself, even when he regards others who have left a great deal behind, 'I want to imitate those who despise this world, but I have nothing to leave behind.' You leave a great deal behind, my friends, if you renounce your desires. Our external possessions, no matter how small, are enough for the Lord: he weighs the heart and not the substance, and does not measure the amount we sacrifice to him but the effort with which we bring it. If we think only about the outward substance, we see that our holy traders purchased the everlasting life of angels when they gave up their nets and boat!

The kingdom of God has no assessment value put on it, but it is worth everything you have. To Zacchaeus it was worth half his goods, because he kept the other half to restore fourfold what he had taken unjustly[1]; to Peter and Andrew it was worth the nets and boat they gave up; to the widow it was worth two small coins[2]; to another person it was worth a cup of cold water[3]. The kingdom of God, as I said, is worth everything you have.

Think about it, my friends, what has less value when you purchase it, what is more precious when you possess it? But perhaps a cup of cold water offered to someone who needs it is not enough; even then the Word of God gives us assurance. When our Redeemer was born, heavenly citizens were revealed who cried out, *Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth to men of good will!*[4] In the sight of God no hand is ever empty of a gift if the ark of the heart is filled with good will. The psalmist says, *The offerings of praise which I will make to you, O God, are in me*[5]. He means, 'Although I have no gifts to offer outwardly, yet I find within myself something to place on the altar of your praise. You who have no need of anything we can give are better pleased with an offering of our heart.'

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[1] Lk 19:8 [2] Mk 12:42 [3] Mt 10:42 [4] Lk 2:14

Nothing can be offered to God more precious than good will. Good will means to experience fear for the adversities of another as if they were our own, to give thanks for a neighbor's prosperity as for our own advancement, to believe another's loss is our own, to count another's gain our own, to love a friend not in the world but in God, to bear even with an enemy by loving him, to do to no one what you do not wish to suffer yourself, to deny no one what you rightly desire for yourself, to choose to help a neighbor in need not only to the extent of your ability but even to assist him beyond your means. What is richer and more substantial than this whole burnt offering, when what the soul is offering to God on the altar of its heart is a sacrifice of itself?[2]*

But this sacrifice of good will is never fully accomplished unless the cravings of this world are completely abandoned. Whatever we crave in the world we undoubtedly envy our neighbors for having: it appears indeed that we lack what someone else has gained! Envy is always so much opposed to good will that as soon as it seizes our hearts good will disappears. Holy preachers, in order to be able to love their neighbors completely, have been eager to love nothing in this world, to seek nothing ever, to possess and even to desire nothing.

Isaiah admired such people and said: *Who are they that fly like clouds, and like doves at their windows?*[6] He sees them despising earthly things, approaching heavenly things in their hearts, raining words, flashing miracles. Those whom

[5] Ps 56 (55):12

[6] Is 60:8

holy preaching and a noble life had lifted above earthly contact he calls flying doves and clouds. Your eyes are windows, since the soul looks through them at what it craves outside. Doves are guileless animals, unacquainted with bitterness and malice. Those who crave nothing in this world, who look at everything without guile, whom eager greed does not draw to what they see, are like doves at their windows. But on the other hand, one who pants with desire to snatch what he observes with his eyes is a hawk, and not a dove at its windows.

We are celebrating the heavenly birthday of the blessed apostle Andrew, dearly beloved. We must therefore imitate what we venerate. Let the solemn observance of an unchanged mind reveal our devoted service. Let us despise what is earthly; let us leave behind what is temporal and purchase what is eternal. If we cannot yet abandon our own possessions, let us at least not crave another's; if our hearts do not yet burn with the fire of charity, let vigilance curb their striving. Then, animated by their advance, step by step, they check their hunger for the things of others and are finally led to despise their own possessions.

NOTES

1. Homily 5 in Migne (*PL* 1093), for the feast of Saint Andrew, November 30. This pericope (Matthew 4:18-22) was used at Rome shortly after Gregory's time, according to marginal notes in two Gospel manuscripts in the British Museum (Cotton. Nero D. IV, the famous Lindisfarne Gospels, and Regius I. B. VII, hereafter referred to by the symbol N. The Gospel pericopes are listed by Morin in the *Revue Bénédictine* (1891) 484-85 and the *Anecdota Maredsolana* 1: 426-35, as well as another Gospel book of the eighth century, listing in its margin practically the same Roman pericopes (Würzburg, Mp. th. fol. 68, called the Gospel book of Burchard, an early bishop of the city, hereafter referred to by the symbol Bu. Its pericopes are listed by Morin in the *Revue Bénédictine* 10 (1893) 113-26).
2. Giving up one's possessions or desires, offerings of good will made from the heart, along with sorrow for one's past sins or compunction, are considered by Gregory as the equivalent of sacrificial offerings made to God upon the altar. But for him they are only the

beginning of the road, as it were. These are but the necessary preparations for fuller union with God in contemplation. This progress from acts of charity or compunction to contemplation of God can be seen clearly in passages from other commentaries of Gregory, e.g., his *Commentary on Ezechiel* (CC 394: 508-396, 574) and his *Morals, Commentary on Job* (*PL* 76: 275 B- 277 C; 291 D- 292 C).

homily 3

And there shall be signs in the sun and in the moon and in the stars, and upon the earth distress of nations with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring, men overcome with fear and foreboding of what is coming on the whole world, for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds with great authority and majesty. And when these things begin to take place, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is coming near.
(Luke 21:25-33)[1]*

Our Lord and Redeemer, dearly beloved, wanting to find us ready, denounced the evils that would accompany the ageing world in order to restrain us from loving it. He made known what great disruptions would precede its approaching end so that if we chose not to fear God during peacetime, when we were struck by its disruptions we would be afraid of his judgment when it was near.

Just before the passage from the holy Gospel you have just heard, dear friends, the Lord says that *nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be great earthquakes in various places, and pestilence and famine.*[1] Then comes what you have just listened to: *There will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations with perplexity, the roaring of the sea and the waves.* We see some of these things already coming to pass, and dread that the rest are soon to follow. We see nation rising against nation and the distress that follows on the earth, more now in our day than we have read about in books. You know how often we have heard from other parts of the world that earth-

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1. Lk 21:10-11

quakes have destroyed countless cities; we have suffered pestilence without relief; we do not yet clearly see the signs in the sun and moon and stars, but from the change in the air now we gather that these too are not far off. Before Italy was handed over to be struck by the pagans' sword, we saw fiery flashes in the sky indicating the blood of the human race that was later shed. No new confusion of sea and waves has yet welled up. But when many of the things foretold have already come to pass, there is no doubt but that even the few that remain will follow. The accomplishment of things past is a clear indication of things to come.

I am saying these things, dearly beloved, for this reason, that your minds may be watchful and disposed to caution, that they not grow lax out of a sense of security and torpid out of ignorance. Let fear make them ever alert, and alertness strengthen them in good works, as they ponder what our Redeemer also speaks of: *Men overcome with fear and foreboding of what is coming on the whole world; for the powers of heaven will be moved.* What does the Lord mean by the powers of heaven if not the angels, archangels, thrones, dominions, rulers and powers?[2]* At the coming of the severe Judge they will appear visibly before our eyes, to demand of us an exact account of all the things our unseen Creator patiently tolerates.

After this we read: *And then they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds with great authority and majesty:* in other words, they are going to see in power and majesty him whom they chose not to hear in a state of humility. To the extent that they do not now submit their hearts to his patience, they will then experience his power more exactingly.[3]*

He said these things about the condemned; words of consolation for the elect follow at once: *When these things begin to take place, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is coming near.* Truth is exhorting his elect by saying, 'When the disasters of the world become more frequent, when the outraged powers reveal the terror of judgment, *lift up your heads,* that is, let your hearts exult! While the world which is not your friend is coming to an end, the redemption you have sought is coming near.' In holy Scripture 'head' often means 'mind,' because as the head controls our members, so the mind organizes our thoughts. To lift up our heads, then, is to direct our minds to the joys of our heavenly homeland.

Those who love God are ordered to rejoice and be merry at the world's end. They will soon find him whom they love, while what they have not loved is passing away. It should be far from the hearts of all the faithful who long to see God to grieve over the disasters of a world they know these very disasters are to end. It is written that *whoever wishes to be a friend of this world makes himself an enemy of God.*[2] Someone who does not rejoice as the end of the world approaches testifies that he is its friend, and this convicts him of being God's enemy. Let this be far from the hearts of the faithful, let it be far from those who believe by their faith that there is another life, and who love it by their activities. To grieve at the destruction of the world suits those whose hearts are rooted in the love of it, those who do not seek the life to come, who do not even realize that it exists. But we who acknowledge the eternal joys of our heavenly homeland should hasten to it with all speed; we must choose to set out for it very quickly and to come to it by the shortest way. By what evils is the world not oppressed? What sorrow, what adversity does not afflict us? What is our mortal life except a way? Consider carefully, my friends, what sort of thing it is to grow weary with the exertions of the way, and yet to be unwilling that the way be ended!

Our Redeemer makes clear by an apt comparison that we are to tread on and despise the world when he adds, *Look at the fig tree, and all the trees; when they produce their fruit you know that summer is near. So too, when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near.*[4]* He means that just as the coming of summer is recognized by the fruit on the trees, so is the nearness of the kingdom of God recognized by the destruction of the world. These words show that the fruit of the world is destruction: it increases only to fall, it produces only to destroy by its disasters whatever it produces. The kingdom of God is aptly compared to summer, because it is then that the clouds of our sorrow pass away, and the days of life shine with the brightness of the eternal sun.

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[2] Jm 4:4

All these things are affirmed with great certainty by this verdict of the Lord: *Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all has taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.* Nothing among material realities is more lasting than the heavens and the earth, and nothing among realities passes away as quickly as an utterance. A word is nothing as long as it is unfulfilled, and when it is fulfilled it is nothing also, for it can be fulfilled only by passing away. He says, *Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.* He means: 'Nothing that is lasting in your world lasts for eternity without change; and everything that in me is perceived as passing away is kept firm, without passing away. My utterance, which passes away, expresses thoughts that endure without change.'

My friends, what we have heard is now clear. Daily the world is oppressed by new and growing evils. You see how few of you remain from a countless people; yet daily afflictions still oppress us, sudden disasters crush us, new and unforeseen misfortunes afflict us. In youth the body is vigorous, the chest remains strong and healthy, the neck is straight, the arms muscular; in later years the body is bent, the neck scrawny and withered, the chest oppressed by difficult breathing, strength is failing, and speech is interrupted by wheezing. Weakness may not yet be present, but often in the case of the senses their healthy state is itself a malady. So too the world was strong in its early years, as in its youth: lusty in begetting offspring for the human race, green in its physical health, teeming with a wealth of resources. Now it is weighed down by its old age, and as troubles increase it is oppressed as if the by the proximity of its demise.

Therefore, my friends, do not love what you see cannot long exist. Keep in mind the Apostle's precept, in which he counsels us *not to love the world or the things in the world, because if anyone loves the world the love of the Father is not in him.*[3] The day before yesterday, my friends, you heard that an old orchard was uprooted by a sudden hurricane, that homes were destroyed and churches knocked from their foundations. How many persons who were safe and unharmed in the evening, thinking of what they would do the next day, suddenly died that night, caught in a trap of destruction?

We must reflect that to bring these things about our unseen Judge caused the movement of a very slight breeze; he called a storm out of a single cloud and overthrew the earth, he struck the foundations of many buildings, causing them to fall. What will that Judge do when he comes in person, when his anger is burning to punish sinners, if we cannot bear him when he strikes us with an insignificant cloud? What flesh will withstand the presence of his anger, if he moved the wind and overthrew the earth, stirred up the air and destroyed so many buildings? Paul referred to this severity of the Judge who is to come and said: *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*[4] The psalmist described it, saying, *God will clearly come, our God, and he will not keep silent; fire will be burning in his sight, and round about him a mighty tempest.*[5] A tempest and fire accompany the severity of such strict justice, the tempest testing those whom the fire burns.

Dearly beloved, keep that day before your eyes, and whatever you now believe to be burdensome will be light in comparison with it. The prophet says of that day: *The great day of the Lord is near, near and exceedingly swift. The sound of the*

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[3] Jn 2:15 [4] Heb 10:31 [5] Ps 50:3 (V 49:3)

day of the Lord is bitter; the mighty man will be afflicted there. A day of wrath that day, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and misery, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of cloud and whirlwind, a day of trumpet blast and battle cry.[6] And the Lord says of this day through the prophet: *Yet once more and I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.*[7]

You see how he moved the air, as I said, and the earth did not withstand it. Who then will bear it when he moves the sky? What shall we call these terrors we see but heralds of the wrath to come? We must reflect that these troubles are as much unlike the final one as the herald's role is unlike the judge's power. Give hard thought to that day, dearly beloved; amend your lives, change your habits, resist and overcome your evil temptations, requite your evil deeds by your tears. The more you now anticipate his severity by fear, the more securely will you behold the coming of your eternal Judge.

6. Zp 1:14–16 7. Hg 2:6, 21; Heb 12:26

NOTES

1. Homily 1 in Migne (*PL* 1077). This Gospel passage is assigned to Advent in Bu. In the Roman liturgy these pericopes concerning the signs of the end of the world which would precede the second coming of the Lord were generally used for the first Sundays of Advent.
2. For a fuller explication of these names, taken from the Letters of Saint Paul, which indicate the so-called nine ranks of angels, see homily 34.
3. This paragraph, and the following, were used by Bede in his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 369, 272 - 370, 286).
4. This sentence and the following paragraph were also used by Bede in his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 370, 286/99).

homily 4

> *And this is the record of John. When the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?' He confessed and did not deny: 'I am not the Christ.' And they asked him. 'What then? Are you Elijah?' And he said, 'I am not.' 'Are you that prophet.' And he answered, no. Then they said to him, 'Who are you—we must give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?' He said, 'I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as the prophet Isaiah said.' And those sent to him came from the Pharisees. 'Then why are you baptizing if you are not the Christ nor Elijah nor the prophet.' John answered them, 'I baptize with water, but among you stands one whom you do not know, he it is who, coming after me, was made before me, I am not worthy to undo the strap of his sandal.'*
> (John 1:19-27)[1]

The words of this reading, dearly beloved, reveal John's humility to us. He was a man of such virtue that he could have been taken to be the Christ, but he chose to be seen as what he was lest foolish human credulity force him above himself. *He confessed and did not deny, he confessed, I am not the Christ.* He said, *I am not,* clearly denying what he was not; he did not deny what he was, so that in speaking the truth he might become a member of him whose name he did not falsely usurp for himself. When he chose not to grasp the name of Christ he became a member of Christ; as he strove humbly to acknowledge his weakness he truly deserved to gain Christ's lofty place.

The words of this reading bring to our minds our Redeemer's words in another one, and raise a very involved question. When in another place his disciples asked our Lord about the coming of Elijah, he answered: *Elijah has already come, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they pleased; and if you want to know, John is Elijah.*[1] John, when he was asked, said: *I am not* Elijah. Why is this dearly beloved? Does Truth's prophet deny what Truth asserts? *He is* and *I am not* differ greatly from one another. How is he the prophet of Truth if he is not in agreement with the assertions of Truth?

If we carefully examine Truth himself, what sounded contradictory is found to be not contradictory. The angel said to Zechariah, of the promised birth of John, that *he will come in the spirit and power of Elijah.*[2] This is said because just as Elijah is the forerunner of the Lord's second coming, so was John the forerunner of his first; as Elijah will come as the forerunner of the Judge, so was John the forerunner of the Redeemer. John, then, was Elijah in spirit; he was not Elijah in person. What the Lord spoke of the spirit, John denied of the person. It was right that the Lord should make a spiritual assertion about John to his disciples, and that John should answer the same question to the materialistic crowds not about his spirit but about his body. What John said appears to contradict Truth, yet he did not depart from the path of Truth.

[2*]After he has also denied that he is *the prophet,* since he was able not only to preach the Redeemer but also to point him out, he immediately declares who he is: *I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness.* You know, dearly beloved, that the only-begotten Son is called the Word of the Father, according to the testimony of the evangelist John who said: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*[3]

From our own way of speaking you know that first the voice sounds, and then afterward the word can be heard. John declares that he is the voice because he comes before

1. Mt 17:12, 11:14 2. Lk 1:17 3. Jn 1:1

the Word. He is the forerunner of the Lord's coming and so he is called a voice, since the Father's Word is heard by humans through his ministry. He cries out in the wilderness because he makes known to an abandoned and forsaken Judea the consoling news of its redemption.

As for the subject of his proclamation, he says: *Make straight the way of the Lord, as the prophet Isaiah said.* The Lord's way to the heart is made straight when we listen humbly to the words of Truth; the Lord's way to the heart is made straight when we order our lives in accordance with his precept. And so it is written: *With one who keeps my command my Father and I will come and make our home.*[4] Whoever lifts up his heart in pride, or is filled with avaricious zeal, or defiles himself with the iniquities of a dissipated life, shuts the door of his heart against Truth so that the Lord cannot come to him; such a one destroys the enclosure of his soul with the bar[3*] of vices.

Those who were sent to him inquired: *Then why are you baptizing, if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?* The evangelist, when he told us just before this that *those who had been sent were from the Pharisees,* was silently informing us that they did not say this from any desire to know the truth, but maliciously, expressing their envy. He means that they were asking John about his actions, not knowing how to seek after his teaching, knowing only how to envy.

[4*]A holy person, even when questioned by a twisted heart, is not deflected from his pursuit of goodness. So John responds to words of envy with a preaching of life: *I baptize with water, but among you stands one whom you do not know.* John did not baptize with the Spirit, but with water, since he was unable to take away the sins of those being baptized. He washed their bodies with water, but not their hearts with pardon. Why did one whose baptism did not forgive sins baptize, except that he was observing his vocation as forerunner? He whose birth foreshadowed greater

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[4] Jn 14:23

birth, by his baptizing foreshadowed the Lord who would truly baptize; he whose preaching made him the forerunner of Christ, by baptizing also became his forerunner, using a symbol of the future sacrament. With these other mysteries he makes known the mystery of our Redeemer, declaring that he has stood among men and not been known. The Lord appeared in a human body: he came as God in flesh, visible in his body, invisible in his majesty.

He goes on to say about him: *He who comes after me was made before me.* He says *made before me,* meaning 'put before me'. *He comes after me* because he was born later, but *he was made before me* because he has precedence over me. A little earlier he revealed the reason for this precedence when he said *because he was before me.*[5] He means, 'Even though he was born after me, he surpasses me in that the time of his birth does not limit him. He who is born from his mother in time was begotten of his Father before time.'

5*John reveals the great humility and reverence he owes Christ by saying: *I am not worthy to undo the strap of his sandal.*[6] It was the custom among the ancients that if someone was unwilling to take the wife he should be taking, he who should have come to her as bridegroom by right of relationship would undo his sandal.[7] How did Christ appear among men if not as the bridegroom of holy Church? John said of him that *He who has the bride is the bridegroom.*[8] Since people considered John the Christ, a fact which he denied, he was right to declare his unworthiness to undo the strap of Christ's sandal. It is as if he was saying, 'I am not able to lay bare the footsteps of the Redeemer, because I am not unrightfully usurping for myself the name of bridegroom.'

We can also interpret this verse in another way. We all know that sandals are made from dead animals. Our Lord came in the flesh; he appeared as if shod in sandals because he assumed in his divinity the dead flesh of our corrupt condition. So he says by the prophet: *Over Edom I shall cast my*

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[5] Jn 1:15, 30 [6] Dt 25:7-9 [7] Rt 4:7 [8] Jn 3:29

sandal.[9] Edom refers to the Gentiles, and the sandal to the human nature that he assumed. The Lord declares that he casts his sandal over Edom because when he became known in his flesh to the Gentiles it was as if his divinity was coming to us shod in sandals.

[6]*The human eye is not able to grasp the mystery of Christ's incarnation. In no way can we discover how the Word took on a body, how the supreme life-giving Spirit came to life in his mother's womb, how he who has no beginning both is and is conceived. The sandal strap is the bond of a mystery. John is not able to undo the strap of his sandal because not even he who recognized the mystery of the Lord's incarnation through the spirit of prophecy can subject it to investigation.

What does he mean, then, when he says, *I am not worthy to undo the strap of his sandal,* except to clearly and humbly admit his own ignorance? 'Why is it surprising if he has precedence over me? I can see that he was born after me, but I do not grasp the mystery of his birth.' John was filled with the spirit of prophecy, and he shone with wonderful knowledge; and yet he implies that there is something he does not understand.

In connection with this, dearly beloved, we must consider and ponder with all our attention, how holy men possessing wonderful knowledge strive to bring before their inner eyes what they do not know in order to guard the virtue of humility. On the one hand they consider their weakness; on the other their hearts are not exalted in regard to that in which they are perfect. Knowledge is a virtue, but it has humility as its guardian.

It remains, then, that the mind should abase itself in regard to everything it knows, lest the wind of exaltation blow away what the virtue of knowledge is vigorously gathering in. When you do something good, my friends, always call to mind the evils you have done. While you heed your fault, your heart is never heedlessly happy because of its good work. Those of you who are over others, pay special attention to your neighbors, particularly to those who have not been entrusted to your care. You do not know what good may lie hidden even in those you see doing something wrong. Let each of you, then, strive to be great in virtue, but nonetheless let him know that he is not so in some degree. Otherwise he may proudly attribute his greatness to himself and lose whatever good he has; he might even be rejected because of his sin of pride. This is why the prophet said: *Woe to you who are wise in your own eyes and prudent in your own sight;*[10] and Paul: *Do not be prudent in your own sight;*[11] and it was said against Saul in his pride: *When you were little in your own eyes, I made you head of the tribes of Israel.*[12] It is as if he were being told, 'When you regarded yourself as little, I made you greater than the rest; because you regard yourself as great, I judge you to be little.'

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[9] Ps 60:8 (V 59:10)

On the opposite side, when David despised the power of his kingship by dancing in front of the ark of the Lord, he said: *I will make merry, and become more contemptible, and I will be humble in my own eyes.*[13] To break the mouths of lions,[14] to destroy the strength of bears, to be chosen when his older brothers were rejected, to be anointed to govern the kingdom when the former kind was repudiated,[15] to bring down with one stone Goliath whom everyone feared,[16] to bring back the foreskins of countless foreigners at the king's command,[17] to receive the kingdom according to the promise, and to rule over the entire people of Israel thenceforward without any resistance: these things did not make him proud! He looked down on himself in every way, and confessed that he was humble in his own eyes.

If holy men think themselves worthless even when they do brave deeds, what will those who swell up with pride

[10] Is 5:21 [11] Rm 12:16 [12] 1 S 15:17 [13] 1 S 6:21–22
[14] 1 S 17:34–36 [15] 1 S 16:10–13 [16] 1 S 17:49 [17] 1 S 18:25–27

even without doing any virtuous work say to excuse themselves? Whatever good works are at hand are worth nothing unless they are seasoned with humility. No marvelous deed done with pride raises you up—it weighs you down! A person who gathers virtues without humility is like one carrying dust in a wind: he is worse blinded by what we see him carrying.

My friends, in everything you do hold on to humility as the root of good works. Do not look at the things which make you better now, but at those which make you still bad. When you set before yourselves the example of those who are better, you may always be able to rise above your humble place.

NOTES

1. Homily 7 in Migne (*PL* 1099). The Gospel pericope is assigned by Bu to the first week, or first Sunday, before the birth of the Lord, i.e., of Advent. Early on in some places there were five or six Advent Sundays instead of the four that we are accustomed to in recent centuries.
2. This paragraph, and the following one, were used by Bede in his *Commentary on Mark* (CC 120: 438, 66/74).
3. The Latin word translated 'bar' is *seris*—could it be translated club? 'Club of his vices'?
4. This paragraph also—except for the two final sentences—is given in Bede's *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 80, 2399/2407).
5. Another paragraph taken over by Bede both for his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 80, 2407/20) and his *Commentary on Mark* (CC 120: 441, 174/86).
6. Again, a paragraph used by Bede both in his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 80, 2420/28) and in his *Commentary on Mark* (CC 120: 441, 186 - 442, 193).

homily 5

Now when John had heard in prison about the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples and said to him, 'Are you he who is to come or shall we look for another?' Jesus answered and said to them, 'Go and show John the things you hear and see: The blind see, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the Gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who takes no offence at me.' And as they left, Jesus began to tell the crowds about John. 'What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? But what did you go out into the wilderness to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Those who wear soft garments are in king's houses. But what did you go out in the wilderness to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is he of whom it is written: Behold I and sending my angel before your face, who will prepare your way before you.'

(Matthew 11:2-10)[1]*

There is a question we must ask, dearly beloved. John was a prophet and more than a prophet; he pointed out the Lord as he was coming to be baptized, saying, *Look! the lamb of God; look! he who takes away the sins of the world.*[1] Pondering both his humility and the power of his divinity, he said: *He who is of the earth speaks of the earth; he who comes from heaven is above all.*[2] When he had been committed to prison, why did he send his disciples to ask, *Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?* as if he did not know the one he had pointed out, as if he did not know whether he was the same person he had proclaimed by prophesying, by baptizing, by pointing him out!

We can resolve this question more quickly if we reflect on the time and order of the events. John was at the river

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1. Jn 1:29 2. Jn 3:31

Jordan when he declared that Jesus was the Redeemer of the world; he had been cast into prison when he asked whether they were to look for another, or whether he had come. He did not ask because he doubted that Jesus was the Redeemer of the world, but to know if he who had come into the world in person would also go down in person to the courts of hell. By dying he was to precede into hell the one whose forerunner he was when he proclaimed him to the world. He said, *Are you he who is to come or shall we look for another?* as if saying, 'Just as you deigned to be born on behalf of human beings, make manifest whether you will also deign to die on our behalf. Then I who was the forerunner of your birth may also become the forerunner of your death, and may proclaim you in hell as the one who is to come, as I have already proclaimed to the world that you have come.'

[2]*When the Lord heard John's question, he related the miracles accomplished by his power, and referred to the degradation of his death: *The blind see, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the Gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who takes no offence at me.* No one who had seen so many signs and such power could have taken offence; he could only have marvelled. The unbelievers took serious offence at him when after so many miracles they saw him dying. And so Paul says: *We preach Christ crucified, an offence to Jews, and foolishness to Gentiles.*[3] It seemed foolish to people that the Author of life should die on behalf of human beings, and humans saw him as an offence when they should rather have considered themselves in his debt. We ought to honor God more worthily in proportion to the unworthy things he sustained on our behalf.

[3]*What does he mean then by saying, *Blessed is he who takes no offence at me,* if he is not clearly expressing the abject quality and degradation of his death? It is as if he is

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3. 1 Co 1:23

saying, 'Indeed I perform marvels, but I do not refuse to suffer abjectly. I am following you in dying. People who honor my miracles must beware lest they despise my death.'

[4]*Let us listen to his words to the crowds about John after John's disciples had been sent away. *What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?* He did not expect assent to this, but a denial. As soon as a slight breeze blows on a reed it bends away. What does the reed represent if not an unspiritual soul? As soon as it is touched by approbation or slander, it turns in every direction. If a slight breeze of approbation comes from someone's mouth, it is cheerful and proud, and it bends completely, so to speak, toward being pleasant; but if a wind of slander comes from the source from which the breeze of praise was coming, it is quickly turned in the opposite direction, toward raving anger.

John was no reed, shaken by the wind. No one's pleasant attitude made him agreeable, and no one's anger made him bitter. Prosperity could not elevate him nor adversity bring him down. This was no reed shaken by the wind! No change in events bent him from his upright state. Let us learn not to be a reed shaken by the wind, dearly beloved, let us steady our minds before the breezes of opinion, let our hearts remain unbending. No slander should provoke us to anger, and no favor make us revel in foolish pleasure. Prosperity should not make us proud nor adversity trouble us. We who are firmly established in faith should not be moved at all by the vicissitudes of passing events.

The Lord continues: *But what did you go out into the wilderness to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Behold, those who wear soft garments are in kings' houses!*[5]* John is described as wearing a garment of camel's hair,[4] as you know. What do these words mean, then? Are they not a clear indication that those who avoid suffering troublesome things for God's sake are not fighting for a heavenly kingdom but for an

4. Mt 3:4

earthly one, and that those given over solely to external things are seeking the softness and delights of the present life? No one should think that there is no sin in pursuing changing fashions in clothing. If it were not a fault the Lord would not have praised John for the roughness of his clothing, nor would the apostle Peter in his letter have checked the desire of women for costly clothes, saying *not in precious clothing.*[5] Consider what a fault it is for men too to desire them, when the Church's pastor took care to forbid them even to women![6]

That it is said that John was not clothed in soft garments can also be taken in another way.[6*] He was not clothed in soft garments because he did not flatter the lives of those who were sinning with his charming words; he reproved them with the force of bitter denunciation, saying: *You brood of adders,*[7] *who warned you to flee the wrath to come?*[8] Solomon said that *the words of wise men are like goads, like nails driven deep.*[9] The words of wise men are compared to nails and goads because they do not know how to chide gently the faults of evildoers; they pierce them.

But what did you go out in the wilderness to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. It belongs to the ministry of a prophet to speak the things that are going to come about, but not physically to point them out. John is more than a prophet, because by pointing him out he also proclaimed the one whom he had prophesied of as his forerunner.

That John was a reed shaken by the wind was denied; he was described as not clothed in soft garments; the name of a prophet was said to be unsuited to him: let us now listen to what could appropriately be said of him.

[7*]*This is he of whom it is written: Behold, I am sending my angel before your face, who will prepare your way before you.* The Greek word 'angel' means 'messenger'. The one sent

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5. 1 P 3:3 6. 1 Tm 2:9 7. Mt 3:7, Lk 3:7
8. Qo 12:11

to proclaim the Judge from on high is rightly called an angel, that the dignity of the name may reflect the glory of the work. The name is indeed exalted, and his life was not inferior to his name. Would that all of us who are called priests, dearly beloved, could say, and not to our condemnation, that we are graced with the name of angels! The prophet testifies that the *lips of the priest should guard knowledge, and people will seek law from his mouth, for he is the angel of the Lord of hosts.*[9] You too, if you wish it, can deserve the exalted quality of this name. Each one of you, in so far as he can, in so far as he receives an inspiration from on high—if he recalls his neighbor from his wickedness, takes care to encourage him to do good, proclaims the eternal kingdom or eternal punishment to one astray—when he provides the words of the holy message—each one of you is truly an angel.

No one should say, I am unable to give counsel, I am not qualified to encourage anyone. Do as much as you can, lest you be tormented for having badly kept what you received. He who was given only one talent was more eager to hide it than to distribute it.[10] We know that in God's tabernacle not only bowls, but ladles too, were made at the Lord's bidding.[11] The bowls signify a more than sufficient teaching, the ladles a small and limited knowledge. One full of true teaching fills the minds of his hearers and in this way provides a bowl by what he says; another cannot expound what he perceives, but because he proclaims it as best he can he truly offers a ladleful to taste. You who are in God's tabernacle, in his holy Church, if you cannot fill bowls with the wisdom of your teaching, give to your neighbors ladles filled with a good word, as much as you have from the divine bounty. Draw others as far as you consider you have advanced; desire to have comrades on your way toward God.

If any of you, my friends, is going to the market, or perhaps to the public baths, he will invite someone whom he

[9] Ml 2:7
[10] Mt 25:18
[11] Ex 37:16

sees to have nothing else to do to come with him. That earthly kind of action is habitual among you. So, if you are going toward God, take care not to go to him alone. It is written, *Let him who hears say, Come!*[12] The one who has already received in his heart a word of heavenly love may also return to his neighbors an external word of encouragement. He may have no bread to give as an alms to someone in need, but he who has a tongue has something more with which to make an offering. It is a greater thing to restore with a nourishing word a mind that will live for ever than to satisfy with earthly bread the stomach of a body that is going to die.

Therefore do not keep back the alms of a word, my friends, from your neighbors. I am counseling myself along with you. Keep yourselves from idle talk,[8*] and avoid useless speech. In so far as we can, we should struggle against our tongues, refraining from idle talk and avoiding useless speech. Do not let your words pour forth into the wind, since your Judge asks you, Do you not know that on the day of judgement you will render an account for every idle word that proceeds from your mouth?[13] A word which lacks either the usefulness which comes from uprightness or the justification of real need is worthless. Therefore transform your worthless conversations into a pursuit of improvement. Consider how quickly the time allotted to this life is running out, give heed to the coming of your strict Judge. Have him before the eyes of your heart, call him to your neighbors' remembrance. Then as far as your strength allows it, if you do not neglect to make him known, you may be worthy to have him call you an angel along with John.

[12] Rv 22:17
[13] Mt 12:36

NOTES

1. Homily 6 in Migne (*PL* 1095). N assigns this pericope to any Sunday in Advent, Bu to the second Sunday of Advent.
2. This paragraph is quoted by Bede in his *Commentary on Luke* (*CC* 120: 160, 2376/79).
3. Another paragraph is used by Bede in his *Commentary on Luke* (*CC* 120: 160, 2379/84).
4. The entire paragraph is taken over by Bede in his *Commentary on Luke* (*CC* 120: 161, 2391/2401).
5. This entire long paragraph, except for a few sentences, including the final one, is to be found in Bede's *Commentary on Luke* (*CC* 120: 161, 2404/20).
6. This one sentence was used by Bede in *Commentary on Mark* (*CC* 120: 441, 159/62).
7. Another paragraph given by Bede in his *Commentary on Luke* (*CC* 120: 161, 2422 - 162, 2434).
8. *ab otioso sermone* and *ab otiosis sermonibus* recall *otiosi sermonis* in The Rule of Saint Benedict, 67.4.

homily 6

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being procurator of Judaea, Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysania tetrarch of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of the Lord came upon John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness. And he came into the region of the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. As it is written in the book of Isaiah the prophet, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare the way of the Lord; make straight his paths. Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill shall be brought low, and the crooked shall be made straight and the rough ways shall be made smooth. And all flesh shall see the salvation of God. He said to the crowds that went out to be baptized by him: 'Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee the wrath to come? Bring forth, therefore, fruits worthy of repentance, and do not begin to say, We have Abraham as our father: I tell you God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. And now the axe is laid to the root of the tree. Every tree that does not bring forth good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.' And the crowd asked him, 'What shall we do?' He answered them, 'He who has two tunics should share with one who has none, and he who has food should do likewise.'

(Luke 3:1-11)[1]*

The recalling of the rulers of the Roman republic and in Judea indicates the time when our Redeemer's forerunner received his mission to preach: *In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being procurator of Judea, Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip* *tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysania tetrarch of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of the Lord came upon John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness.*

²*Since John was coming to preach one who was to redeem some from Judea and many from among the Gentiles, the period of his preaching is indicated by naming the Gentiles' ruler and those of the Jews; but because the Gentiles were to be gathered together, and Judea dispersed on account of the error of its faithlessness, this description of earthly rule also shows us that in the Roman republic one person presided, and in the kingdom of Judea there were several ruling in four different areas. In our Redeemer's own words, *Every kingdom divided against itself will be laid waste.*[1] It is apparent, then, that Judea, which lay divided among so many kings, had reached the end of its sovereignty.

It was also appropriate to indicate not only under which kings but also under which high priests this occurred. Since John the Baptist preached one who was at once both king and priest, the evangelist Luke indicated the time of his preaching by referring to both the kingship and the high priesthood.

And he came into all the region of the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. It is apparent to all who read that John not only preached a baptism of repentance but also bestowed it on some; yet he was not able to bestow a baptism for the forgiveness of sins. Forgiveness of sins is granted us only in the baptism of Christ. We must note the words *preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.* He preached a baptism which would take away sins, but he was unable to give it himself. Just as by his word of preaching he was the forerunner of the Father's Word incarnate, so by his baptism, which could not of itself take away sin, he was to be the forerunner of that baptism of repentance by which sins are taken away. His words prepared the way for the Redeemer's actual presence, and his preaching of baptism was a foreshadowing of the Truth.

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[1] Lk 11:17

Next we read: *As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.*[3]* This same John the Baptist, on being asked who he was, answered, *I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness.*[2] I have said before that the prophet called him a voice because he preceded the Word.[4]* What he was crying is disclosed to us: *Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.*[5]* What else is anyone preaching the true faith and good works doing but preparing the way for the Lord to come to his hearers' hearts so that the power of grace may enter them and the light of truth pervade them? He makes the Lord's paths straight when he predisposes the mind for good thoughts by his good preaching.

Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low. What is meant by 'valleys' here but those who are humble, and what by 'mountains and hills' but the proud? At our Redeemer's coming the valleys are filled and the mountains and hills brought low because, as he said, *Everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, and everyone who humbles himself shall be exalted.*[3] A valley filled increases, but a mountain and hill brought low decrease. By their faith in the *mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus*[4] the Gentile races received the fullness of grace; the Jewish race, by the error of its faithlessness, lost what had made it swell up in pride.

Every valley shall be filled because holy teaching will fill up the hearts of the humble with the grace of the virtues, according to what is written: *He sends forth springs in the valleys;*[5] and again, *And the valleys will overflow with grain.*[6] Water flows down from the mountains because the doctrine of Truth leaves proud minds; springs well up in the valleys

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2. Jn 1:23 3. Lk 14:11 4. 1 Tm 2:5 5. Ps 104:10 (V 103:10)
6. Ps 65:13 (V 64:14)

because humble hearts accept the word of preaching. Already we see valleys overflowing with grain because the mouths of those who are gentle and guileless, who appear contemptible to this world, have been filled with nourishing truth.

Because people had seen that John the Baptist was endowed with astonishing holiness they believed him to be that uniquely high and firm mountain of which it was written: *In the final days the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established on the top of the mountains.*[7] They considered that he was the Christ, as is said in the Gospel, *The people were deliberating, all questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether perhaps he might be the Christ,*[8] and they asked him, Are you the Christ? If John had not been a valley in his own eyes he would not have been full of the grace of the Spirit.[9] To make clear what he was he answered: *There comes after me one who is stronger than I, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to undo;*[10] and again he said: *He who has the bride is the bridegroom; the friend of the bridegroom , who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. This joy of mine is now full. He must increase, but I must decrease.*[11]

When on account of his astonishing deeds of virtue people believed him to be such that he might be the Christ, not only did he answer that he was not the Christ, he asserted that he was not worthy to undo the strap of Christ's sandal, meaning to investigate the mystery of his incarnation. Those who thought him the Christ believed that the Church was his bride, but he said, *He who has the bride is the bridegroom,* as if saying, I am not the bridegroom, I am his friend. He stated that he rejoiced not in his own voice but in the voice of the bridegroom: his heart was not happy because people listened humbly to him when he spoke, but because he himself heard the voice of Truth interiorly, impelling him to speak of it to others. He did well to say that his joy had been made full, because no one who rejoices at his own voice has full joy.

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[7] Mi 4:1 [8] Lk 3:15 [9] Jn 1:19-20
[10] Mk 1:7, Lk 3:16, Jn 1:17 [11] Jn 3:29-30

He must increase, but I must decrease. We must inquire how Christ increased, and how John decreased. The answer lies in this: people seeing John's abstinence and his remoteness from human intercourse considered him the Christ; whereas observing Christ eating with publicans and living in the midst of sinners, they believed him not to be the Christ but a prophet.[12] With the passage of time they recognized that Christ, whom they considered a prophet, was the Christ, and came to know John, whom they believed to be the Christ, as a prophet. Then was fulfilled what the forerunner had foretold of Christ: *He must increase, but I must decrease.* In the judgment of the people, Christ increased because he was recognized for what he was, and John decreased because he ceased being called what he was not. John remained steadfast in holiness because he continued to be humble of heart, and many people have fallen because they swelled up in their own sight through their proud thoughts. It can fittingly be said, *Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low,* because the humble receive the gift which the hearts of the proud reject.

The crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways smooth.[6*] The crooked are made straight when the hearts of evil persons, twisted by unrighteousness, are set on the path of righteousness; rough ways are changed into smooth ones when pitiless and angry hearts are rendered gentle and meek by being imbued with grace from on high. When an angry heart does not receive the word of truth, it is as if a rough road is impeding a traveller's progress; when an angry heart receives a word of reproof or exhortation because of the grace of meekness it has been given, a preacher finds a smooth way there where previously he could not travel, that is, progress with his preaching, because of the roughness of the road.

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[12] Mt 9:11

And all flesh shall see the salvation of God. All flesh means 'every human being'. Not every human being has been able to see *the salvation of God,* Christ, in this life. In this passage where does the prophet direct the eye of prophecy except to the day of the final judgment? Then, when the heavens are opened, and the angels are assisting him there, and the apostles are enthroned with him *on the throne of his majesty,*[13] Christ will appear. Everyone, elect and condemned together, will see him, that the righteous may rejoice unendingly at receiving their recompense, and the unrighteous may groan for ever in the torment of their punishment.

That this passage means that he will be seen by *all flesh* at the final judgment is implied in what follows: *He said to the crowds that went out to be baptized by him: Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee the wrath to come?* The *wrath to come* is the penalty of the final punishment. The sinner who does not now have recourse to sorrow and repentance will not be able to flee the wrath later. We must note that evil offspring who imitate the actions of their evil parents are called a *brood of vipers.* They envy the good and persecute them and some of them they harm; they look for ways to injure their neighbors. Since in doing all these things they are following the ways of their ancestors, they are brought forth like the poisonous children of poisonous parents.

But since we have sinned, since we have become accustomed to an evil way of life, let John tell us what we must do to escape the *wrath to come.* He says: *Bring forth, therefore, fruits worthy of repentance.* We must note in these words that the friend of the bridegroom advises us to bring forth not merely fruits of repentance, but *fruits worthy of repentance.* It is one thing to bring forth fruit, another to bring forth fruit worthy of repentance. To speak rightly of fruits worthy of repentance, we must be aware that a person who has done nothing unlawful is rightly granted the use of

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13. Mt 19:28

what is lawful. He can perform his holy works without giving up the things of the world if he does not wish to. But if someone has fallen into the sin of fornication, or, perhaps more seriously, into that of adultery, he should cut himself off from what is lawful to the extent he remembers he has committed what is unlawful. Good works should not bring the same reward to one who has sinned less seriously and to one who has sinned more seriously; nor to one who has not fallen into wicked deeds and to one who has fallen into some of them. *Bring forth fruits worthy of repentance* applies, then, to the conscience of each individual. Each should seek through repentance the advantages brought by good works in proportion to the seriousness of the harm he has done himself by sinning.

The Jews prided themselves on the nobility of their race; they were unwilling to recognize that they were sinners since they had descended from the stock of Abraham. John aptly told them: *And do not begin to say, We have Abraham as our father! I tell you, God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones!* What were *these stones* if not the hearts of the Gentiles, unaware of the knowledge of almighty God? So too it was said to some of the Jews: *I shall take away the stony heart out of your body.*[14] The Gentiles, who worshipped stones, are properly signified by that name. Hence it is written: *Let their makers become like them, and all who trust in them.*[15] From these stones children have been raised up to Abraham. When the hard hearts of the Gentiles believed in Abraham's offspring, that is, Christ, they became the children of him to whose offspring they were united.

It was of these Gentiles that the preacher said: *If you are Christ's, then, you are Abraham's offspring.*[16] If we are now Abraham's offspring through our faith in Christ, the Jews have ceased to be his children on account of their unbelief. The prophet testifies that on the day of fearful judgment good parents may be of no help to their wicked children:

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[14] Ezk 36:26 [15] Ps 115:8 (V 113:16) [16] Ga 3:29

Even if Noah and Daniel and Job were in the midst of it, as I live, says the Lord God, they would deliver neither son nor daughter; they would deliver but their own lives by their righteousness;[17] and Truth himself tells the Jews, who do not believe that good children may be of no help to their wicked parents, but that their goodness may rather increase their parents' guilt, *If I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your children cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges.*[18]

Next John says: *Even now the axe is laid at the root of the tree. Every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.* The tree is the entire human race in this world. The axe is our Redeemer. His humanity is like the axe's handle and iron head. It is his divinity which cuts. The axe is now laid at the root of the tree because, although he is waiting patiently, what he will do is nonetheless apparent.

Every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. Every wicked person, refusing to bear the fruit of good works in this life, will find the conflagration of gehenna all the more swiftly prepared for him. We must note that he says that the axe is laid not at the branches but at the root. When the children of evil persons are destroyed, what else does this mean but that the branches of the tree that bears no fruit are being cut off? When an entire progeny is destroyed, as well as its parents, the tree that bears no fruit is being cut down from its root. Then nothing will be left from which descendants might sprout again.

It is clear that the words of John the Baptist troubled his hearers' hearts: *And the crowds asked him, What then shall we do?* Those who asked for advice had been struck with terror. *He answered them: He who has two tunics should share with one who has none, and he who has food should do likewise.* Since a tunic is more necessary for our use than a cloak, it belongs to *fruit worthy of repentance* that we must share not only everything that is external and less necessary with our neighbors, but even what is particularly necessary, the food by which our bodies live, and the tunics we wear. It is written in the Law, *You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*[19] A person who does not divide with his needy neighbor what is necessary to him proves that he loves him less than himself. The command is to share two tunics with one's neighbor: he could not have spoken of a single tunic, since if one is shared no one is clothed. Half a tunic leaves the person who receives it naked, as well as the person who gives it.

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[17] Ezk 14:14,16 [18] Lk 11:19

In this context we should be aware of the value of the works of mercy, since they receive more emphasis than the others among the *fruits worthy of repentance.* Truth himself says: *Give alms, and behold, everything is clean for you;*[20] and again, *Give, and it will be given to you.*[21] It is written: *Water extinguishes a blazing fire, and alms atone for sins;*[22] and again: *Deposit an alms in the heart of a poor person, and it will make supplication for you;*[23] and a good father advises his young son, saying: *If you have much, give generously; if you have little, strive to share it generously.*[24]

Our Redeemer, to show the value of the virtues of self-restraint and helping the poor, said: *One who receives a prophet because he bears the name of prophet will have a prophet's reward, and one who receives a righteous man because he is righteous will have a righteous man's reward.*[25] We must note in these words that he did not say, He will get a reward from the prophet, or from the righteous man, but, *he will have a prophet's reward,* and, *he will have a righteous man's reward.* A reward from a prophet is one thing, *a prophet's reward* another; a reward from a righteous man is one thing, *a righteous man's reward another.*

What does it mean to say, *he will have a prophet's reward,* except that one who supports a prophet from his abundance, although he himself does not have the gift of prophecy, will nonetheless have prophecy's recompense from the almighty Lord? Perhaps a righteous person will have greater confidence in speaking on behalf of righteousness if he has nothing in this world. When a person who does have something in this world, and perhaps does not presume to speak freely on behalf of righteousness, supports such a one, he makes himself a sharer in that person's freedom. Then he can receive the recompense of righteousness equally with the one his support helped to freely give his message of righteousness. A person is filled with the spirit of prophecy but lacks food for his body. If his body is not nourished it is certain that his voice will be stilled. One who gives food to a prophet because he is a prophet has given him the strength to make his prophecy, and will have a prophet's reward. He was not filled with the spirit of prophecy, yet in God's sight he provided the means which helped.

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[19] Lv 19:18, Mt 22:39
[20] Lk 11:41
[21] Lk 6:38
[22] Si 3:30
[23] Si 29:12
[24] Tb 4:8
[25] Mt 10:41

John the evangelist wrote to Gaius of some of the brothers who were on a journey, *They have set out for the sake of Christ's name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles; we must support such men, that we may be fellow-workers in the truth.*[26] [8]*One who gives temporal aid to those with spiritual gifts is a fellow-worker in those spiritual gifts. Few receive spiritual gifts, but many are rich with temporal possessions: the wealthy share the virtues of the poor when they provide relief for the holy poor from their riches.

When through Isaiah the Lord promised to the forsaken people of the Gentiles, that is to holy Church, the merits of spiritual virtues like longed-for orchards, he promised an elm tree along with the rest: *I will make the desert a pool of water, and the dry land streams of water; I will put in the wilderness the cedar and the thorn, the myrtle and the olive; I will set in the desert the fir tree, the elm and the box. Then men may see and know, and consider and understand together.*[27] The Lord made the desert into a pool of water, and the dry land into streams of water. He gave the Gentiles, who because of their aridity had earlier borne no fruit in good works, the flowing waters of holy preaching. The way which was formerly closed to preachers because of its roughness and dryness later flowed with brooks of teaching.

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[26] 3 Jn 7–8 [27] Is 41:18–20

And his generosity promises still more: *I will put in the wilderness the cedar and the thorn.* The cedar, owing to its strong aroma and indestructible nature, we may take to refer to the promise. But since God said of the thorn to sinful man, *The earth will bring forth thorns and nettles for you,*[28] is it not astonishing that holy Church is promised the very thing whose increase was a punishment for sinful man? The cedar designates those who show forth virtues and signs in their deeds, those who can say with Paul, *We are the aroma of Christ to God,*[29] whose hearts are so firmly grounded in everlasting love that they are uncorrupted by earthly love. The thorn signifies the teachings of spiritual persons who, when they discuss sins and virtues, threaten eternal punishments at one time and promise the joys of the heavenly kingdom at another; they sting their hearers' hearts, and so pierce their minds with sorrow and compunction that tears flow from their eyes as if their souls were shedding blood.

Myrtle is soothing; by soothing them it contracts muscles which have been stretched. What then does myrtle represent but those who are able to sympathize with the sufferings of their neighbors, who soothe them in their afflictions by their sympathy according to what is written: *But thanks be to God who comforts us in all our afflictions, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any difficulty?*[30] When they bring a word, assistance or comfort to their troubled neighbors, they bring them back to grace and keep them from falling into despair because of their excessive suffering. Whom are we to understand by the olive except those who are merciful? The Greek word *éleos*[9]* means mercy; the fruit of mercy shines like olive oil in the sight of almighty God.

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[28] Gn 3:18 [29] 2 Co 2:15 [30] 2 Co 1:3–4

The promise goes on: *I will set in the desert the fir, the elm along with the box.* Who are designated by the fir, which grows tall and reaches high into the air, if not those who though still within holy Church in their earthly bodies are already contemplating the things of heaven? Although by their birth they are sprung from earth, yet their contemplation raises their mind's eye to the upper air. And what does the elm represent but the hearts of worldly persons? While they are still involved in their earthly concerns, they bear no fruit of spiritual virtue. Yet although the elm has no fruit of its own, it is used to support the grapevine and its fruit.[10]* So too worldly men in the Church, even though they lack the gifts of the spiritual virtues, when they provide for holy men filled with spiritual gifts out of their bounty, what are they doing but supporting the grapevine with its clusters? And what does the boxwood signify? It does not grow very tall, and even though it lacks fruit it remains always green. It signifies those who, owing to the weakness of age, can no longer produce good works in the Church, but who still follow the belief of their faithful parents and so remain eternally green.

Finally, after all these things, we find this most apt conclusion: *That men may see and know, and consider and understand together.* The cedar is planted in the Church so that whoever draws in the aroma of spiritual virtues from his neighbor may not remain inert in his delight with eternal life, but may set others on fire with desire for the good things of heaven. The thorn is planted so that a person filled with remorse at another's preaching may himself learn from this example to bring remorse to the hearts of his followers by his own preaching.

The myrtle is planted so that one thirsting in the heat of suffering, who has received the soothing relief of consolation from the words and work of a sympathizing neighbor, may himself learn to sooth his neighbors in tribulation with his consolation. The olive is planted so that one who profits from another's works of mercy may learn how he must himself have mercy on his neighbor in need.

The fir is planted so that one who has recognized the power of another's contemplative life may also be enkindled to contemplate the eternal rewards. The elm is planted so that anyone who sees a person unable to bring forth the fruit of spiritual virtues, but who supports those who are full of spiritual gifts, may involve himself in the life of the holy to the extent of his bounty; by providing for them he can bear clusters of the heavenly gifts he cannot bring forth himself. The box is planted so that one who reflects on the many who are now in a weakened condition, who yet have the strength to remain green in the true faith, may himself be ashamed that he is still an unbeliever.

And so after all the trees have been listed he wisely concludes: *That men may see and know, and consider and understand,* and then most appropriately adds, *together.* Since there are in our holy Church different functions and different ministries, it is necessary that all learn together; in the Church spiritual men, with a variety of characters, ages and ministries, all appear to have something to teach. But you see that while I have been seeking to clarify the meaning of the elm tree I have wandered far afield over many kinds of trees. And so let me return to the place where I introduced the testimony of the prophet. *One who receives a prophet because he bears the name of prophet will have a prophet's reward.* Although the elm tree bears no fruit, it supports the grapevine with its fruit, and so accomplishes the purpose of providing well for others.

Because John counsels us to perform great works, telling us, *Bring forth fruits worthy of repentance,* and, *He who has two tunics should share with one who has none, and he who has food should do likewise,* it is now evident what Truth means by saying, *From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.*[31] We must examine these divine words very thoroughly. We must ask, how the kingdom of heaven can suffer violence?

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[31] Mt 11:12

Who inflicts violence in heaven? And we must also ask why, if the kingdom of heaven can suffer violence, it has endured violence from the days of John the Baptist, but not earlier?

When the Law says that if anyone does this or that he will surely die,[32] it is apparent to all who read that a severe punishment has struck all sinners, but has not restored them to life through repentance. When John the Baptist became forerunner of our Redeemer's grace, preaching repentance so that a sinner who was dead as a result of his sin might live by being converted, truly from his days the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence. What is the kingdom of heaven but the abode of the righteous? The rewards of our heavenly homeland are owed only to the righteous, so that the humble, the pure, the meek and the merciful reach the joys on high. When anyone who has been swollen with pride, or has slipped into corporal sins, or has been inflamed with anger, or has incurred blame because of cruelty, but after sinning turns to repentance, it is as if the sinner is entering a foreign place. And so *from the days of John the Baptist the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.* What else has the one who proclaimed repentance to sinners done, but teach that violence is done to the kingdom of heaven?

Dearly beloved, let us think over the evils we have committed; let us give ourselves to continual sorrow. Let us seize by our repentance the inheritance of the righteous which we have not kept by our way of life. Almighty God desires to suffer this kind of violence from us. He desires us to seize by our tears the kingdom of heaven which is not owed us on our merits. Let us not let the seriousness of our wickedness, or its extent, shake our firm hope.

Let the worthy thief show us how we may have great confidence in pardon. He is not worthy because he was a thief since his cruelty made him a thief. He was worthy as a result of his confession of guilt. Think how incomprehensible

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32. Ex 19:12, Lv 20:2,27

is the mercy of almighty God! The thief was caught red-handed in his evil work, and hanged on a cross. There he confessed his guilt, there he was forgiven, there he merited to hear: *Today you will be with me in paradise.*[33] What does this mean? Who can describe the great goodness of God? Who can value it properly? From punishment for his crime the thief reached the reward of virtue.

Almighty God has allowed his elect to fall into certain sins. This is so that he may restore hope of pardon to others, who are under the domination of sin, if they will rise up to him with their whole heart; then he can open up for them the way to heaven through sorrow and repentance. Let us then occupy ourselves with sorrow, let us get rid of our sins by tears and fruits worthy of repentance, let us not lose the time that has been granted us. We behold so many persons already washed clean of their iniquities: what else do we have except a pledge of the mercy from on high?

33. Lk 23:43

NOTES

1. Homily 20 in Migne (*PL* 1160). The Gospel pericope is assigned in the margin of N to the first Sunday of Advent, in Bu to the fourth Sunday of Advent.
2. These three paragraphs—except for the final sentence—are given by Bede in his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 75, 2205–76, 2232); the latter half is also to be found in his *Commentary on Mark* (CC 120: 440, 125/35).
3. This paragraph and the first half of the following one were used by Bede in his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 76, 2235/55).
4. In Homily 4.
5. A sentence used by Bede in his *Commentary on Mark* (CC 120: 439, 76/80).
6. This and the following three and a half paragraphs are to be found in Bede's *Commentary on Luke* (CC, 120: 76, 2256 - 78, 2319).
7. This paragraph, together with the major portion of the following two, was taken over by Bede in his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 78, 2320 - 79, 2357).
8. Two sentences to be found in Bede's *Commentary on the Third Letter of John* (CC 121: 333, 49/54).
9. Evidently Gregory connects the Greek word for mercy, *'éleos*, with *'elaía*, which means an olive tree, or *'ḗlaios*, meaning a wild olive tree.
10. The notion here is of an elm tree being used to support grapevines in a vineyard.

homily 7

And it happened in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed. And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria. And all went to be taxed, everyone to his own city. And Joseph also went from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth into Judaea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, for he was of the house and lineage of David, to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, who was great with child.

And so it was that while they were there the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. And there were in the same country shepherds in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks by night. And the angel of the Lord came upon them and the glory of the Lord shone round about them, and they were very much afraid.

And the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. For I am bringing you good tidings of great joy which shall be for all people. For to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign to you. You will find the baby wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.' And suddenly here was with the angel a crowd of heavenly host, praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and peace to persons of good will.

(Luke 2:1–14)[1]*

Because [by the Lord's bounty] I am going to celebrate the eucharist three times today, I can comment only briefly on the Gospel lesson. But [our Redeemer's] birthday compels me to say something, however short.

Why was it that the world was being enrolled just before the Lord's birth except to show that he was coming as man to enroll his elect in eternity? On the other hand, it is said of the condemned by the prophet: *May they be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be enrolled with the righteous.*[1] It was fitting too that he was[2*] born in Bethlehem. Bethlehem is translated 'house of bread', and it is he who said: *I am the living bread who came down from heaven.*[2] The place in which the Lord was born was called the 'house of bread', because it was truly going to come to pass that he would appear there in a material body who would nourish the hearts of his chosen ones by an interior food. He was not born in the house of his parents, but on the road, to show that by the human nature which he had assumed he was being born, so to speak, in a foreign place. I use 'foreign' not of his power but of his nature, since it is written of his power that: *He came among his own.*[3] In his own nature, however, he was born before time began, and came in our nature in time. And so he who appeared in time even while he [remained eternal] truly came down to a foreign place.

And because it was said by the prophet that *all flesh is hay*,[4] he, having become a human being, changed this hay of ours into wheat, and said of himself, *Unless the grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone.*[5] Hence when born he was laid in a manger, that he might nourish all believers, all who lead holy lives that is, with the hay of his body, so that they would not remain empty of the food of heavenly knowledge. And what does it mean[3*] that an angel appeared to the shepherds as they kept watch, and that the brightness of God shone round about them, except that those [who know how to keep careful watch over the believing flocks] merit above all others to see the loftiest things, and that while they watch devotedly over the flock, divine grace shines more profusely upon them?

[1] Ps 69:28 (V 68:29)
[2] Jn 6:51
[3] Jn 1:11
[4] Is 40:6
[5] Jn 12:24

The angel proclaimed that a king had been born, and choirs of angels joined their voices to his and rejoiced with him, crying out: '*Glory to God in the highest, and peace to persons of good will.*' In truth, before our Redeemer was born in a human body, we were at variance with the angels. Because of our daily transgressions we were far from their brightness and cleanness owing to our first sin. Since our sinning made us strangers to God, the angels, God's citizens, cut us off as strangers from their company. But because we acknowledged our king, the angels acknowledged us again as fellow citizens of theirs. Since the king of heaven took upon himself the weakness of our human body, the company of angels on high no longer despises us. The angels return to bring us peace, they put aside the reason for their earlier hostility; they now honor as their companions those whom previously they had despised as weak and despicable. Hence it is that Lot[6] and Joshua[7] worshipped angels and were not prevented from doing so, but [in the Book of Revelation] an angel restrained John from worshipping him when he wished to, saying: *You must not do that, for indeed I am one of your fellow servants, one of your brothers.*[8] Why was it that before our Redeemer's coming angels were worshipped by human beings and remained silent, but afterwards they shunned it, if it is not that after they beheld our nature, which they had formerly despised, raised up above them, they were afraid to see it ranked beneath them? They no longer dared to reject as weak and beneath them what they honored as above themselves in heaven's king, nor did they disdain to have [as their companion] a human being, when they worshipped the human being who was God above themselves.

Let us take care, then, dearly beloved, lest any uncleanness defile us, when in the eternal foreknowledge we are equal to both God's citizens and the angels. Let us preserve our dignity by our way of life. Let not dissoluteness corrupt us, no base thought find us out. Let wickedness not seize our minds, nor the rust of envy consume us. Let pride not puff us up, nor the search for earthly delights devour us, nor anger enflame us. Human beings indeed have been called gods.[9] Therefore, O human being, protect the dignity of God that is yours against vice, because [for your sake] God become a human being.

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[6] Gn 19:1 [7] Jos 5:14 [8] Rv 22:9

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[9] Ps 82 (81):6

NOTES

1. Homily 8 in Migne (*PL* 1103). This Gospel passage is listed as the one to be used for Christmas not only in the margin of N and Bu but also in a third manuscript containing the Gospels, another at Würzburg, Mp. th. fol. 62, of the eighth century, hereafter referred to as W — whose pericopes are to be found listed by Morin in the *Revue Bénédictine* XXVIII (1911), 296 -330. See also Jerome, *Letter* 108 (*CSEL* 55: 316, 20/21).
2. Three and one half sentences taken over by Bede in his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 48, 1153/60; 50, 1213/14).
3. Another sentence taken over by Bede for his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 50, 1242/46).

homily 8

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea, in the days of Herod the king, wise men came from the east to Jerusalem saying, Where is he who is born King of the Jews, for we have seen his star in the east and have come to worship him. When Herod the king heard this he was troubled, and all of Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. And they said to him, in Bethlehem of Judaea, for this is written by the prophet: And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are not least among the princes of Judah, for out of you shall come a governor who shall rule my people Israel.

Then Herod, when he had privately summoned the wise men, asked carefully what time the star had appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, 'Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word back so that I may come and worship him, too.' When they had heard the king, they departed. And the star which they saw in the east went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. And when they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when they had come into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and fell down and worshipped him. And when he had opened their treasures they presented him gifts: gold and frankincense and myrrh. And being warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way.

(Matthew 2:1–12)[1*]

As you have heard in the lesson from the Gospel, dearly beloved, when the king of heaven was born, a king on earth was alarmed. Earthly pride is undoubtedly alarmed when heavenly eminence is made manifest.

But we must ask what it means that when our Redeemer was born, an angel appeared to the shepherds in Judea, but a star and not an angel guided the Magi from the east to worship him. This was the reason: a reasoning being, an angel, preached to the Jews as persons capable of using their reason, but a sign and not a voice guided the Gentiles, who did not know how to make use of reason, to know the Lord. Hence Paul says that: *Prophecy has been given for believers not for unbelievers, but signs have been given for unbelievers and not for believers.*[1] And so prophecy has been given to the Jews as believers and not unbelievers, and signs have been given to the Gentiles as unbelievers and not believers. And we must note that the apostles preached our Redeemer to these same Gentiles when he was already a grown man, but a star declared him to the Gentiles when he was a small child, not yet able to perform the normal human function of speaking. It was surely reasonable both that preachers should make the Lord [when he was already speaking] known to us by speaking, and silent elements should preach him when he was not yet speaking.

But with all these signs that were manifested either when the Lord was born or when he died, we must note the great hardness of heart of some of the Jewish people. They failed to recognize him either by the gift of prophecy or by his miracles. In truth all the elements bore witness that their creator had come. Indeed, to speak of them in a human way, the heavens knew that he was God because they immediately sent forth a star, the sea knew him because it allowed him to walk upon it;[2] the earth knew him because it trembled when he died;[3] the sun knew him because it hid the rays of its light;[4] the stones and walls of houses knew him because they were broken at the time of his death;[5] the lower world recognized him because it gave up the dead it was holding;[6] and yet the hearts of the Jews remained full of unbelief, and did not know that he was God, although all the dumb elements perceived him as Lord. Harder than stones, they were unwilling to be broken for repentance, and they refused to acknowledge him whom, as I have said, the elements proclaimed to be God either by their signs or being broken.

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[1] I Co 14:22
[2] Mt 14:25
[3] Mt 27:51
[4] Mt 27:45
[5] Mt 27:52
[6] Mt 27:53

To the increase of their condemnation, they despised when he was born the one they had long known would be born. And they knew not only that he would be born, but even where he was to be born. For on being asked by Herod, they named the place of his birth as they had learned it from the authority of the scriptures, and they brought forth the testimony that Bethlehem was to be honored by the birth of their new leader. Thus their very knowledge was for them a witness for their condemnation, and for us a help towards belief. Isaac blessing his son Jacob,[7] well prefigured them. For his eyesight was dim and he prophesied, not seeing his son who was present, but foreseeing many things for him in the future. Surely the Jewish people too were filled with the spirit of prophecy, and blind. They foretold many future things about him whom they did not recognize when he was present.

But when Herod knew of the birth of our king, he had recourse to clever arguments to prevent his being deprived of his earthly kingdom. He demanded that it be reported to him where the child was to be found. He pretended that he wished to worship him, to destroy him if he could find him. But of what avail is human malice against the divine plan? *There is no wisdom, no prudence, no plan against the Lord.*[8] The star which had appeared to them guided the Magi on. They found the new-born king and, offered him their gifts; and they were warned in a dream not to return to Herod. And so Herod was unable to find Jesus, whom he was seeking. Who are foreshadowed in his person but the hypocrites, who when they falsely seek after the Lord never deserve to find him?

[7] Gn 27:27-29

[8] Pr 21:30

At this point we should know that the heretical[2*] followers of Priscillian consider that every individual person is born under the influence of the stars. They claim in support of their error that a new star shone forth when the Lord appeared in a human body, which they consider influenced his destiny. But we must weigh the words of the Gospel. It is said of the star, *Until it came to rest over the place where the child was.* It was not the child who was drawn to the star, but the star to the child; if you allow me to say so, the star did not influence the destiny of the child, but the child influenced the destiny of the star by his appearance. But let no talk about destiny come near the hearts of believers. Only the creator, who made human beings directs their lives. Human beings were not made for the sake of the stars, but stars for the sake of human beings. If a star is called the destiny of someone, that person is said to be subject to its control. When Jacob[3*] came out of his mother's womb holding in his hand his elder brother's heel,[9] the elder couldn't have emerged completely without the younger, who followed him, having begun to come out; and yet although their mother gave birth at one and the same time [to both of them], the outcome of their lives was not the same. But the astrologers are accustomed to answer this by saying that the power of the constellations is instantaneous. I, on the contrary, say that a birth takes some time. Therefore if the position of the stars changes in a moment, it will then be necessary for them to say that there are as many destinies as there are members of the body. The astrologers are also accustomed to say that whoever is born under the sign of Aquarius[4*] is allotted the occupation of a fisherman in this life. But people say that Gaetulia[5*] has no fishermen. Would anyone say that [where there are no fishermen] no one is born under the sign of Aquarius? Again, they declare that persons born under the sign of Libra will be bankers; and there are parts of many countries

[9] Gn 25:25-26

that have not bankers. They must therefore admit either that this sign of the Zodiac does not exist among them, or that it has no influence there on people's destinies. Further, in the territories of the Persians and the Franks kings are hereditary. As they are being born, who can say how many slaves are being born at exactly the same moment? The sons of kings are born under the same sign as the sons of slaves, and go on to rule, while the slaves who are born with them die in slavery. I have said this briefly about the star so that I should not appear to have passed over the foolishness of the astrologers in silence.

The Magi brought gold, incense and myrrh. Gold[6*] befits a king; incense is offered in sacrifice to God; the bodies of the dead are embalmed with myrrh. Therefore the Magi, [with their mystical gifts], also preach him whom they worshipped, a king with the gold, God with the incense, a human being with the myrrh.

There are some heretics who believe that he is God, but do not believe that he rules everywhere; they indeed offer him incense, but are unwilling to offer him gold as well. There are some who think that he is king but deny that he is God; these offer him gold but are unwilling to offer him incense. And there are some who say that he is both God and king but deny that he took to himself a human body; these certainly offer him gold and incense, but they are unwilling to offer him the myrrh of the humanity that he assumed. Accordingly, let us too offer gold to the Lord who has been born, that we may say that he rules everywhere; let us offer incense, that we may believe that he who appeared in time existed as God before time; let us offer myrrh, that we may believe that he, who [in his divinity] is unable to suffer, was a human being with a body like ours. There is something more that can be understood by the gold, incense and myrrh. Solomon testifies that gold symbolizes wisdom when he says, *A pleasing treasure lies in the mouth of the wise man.*[10] The psalmist bears witness that incense offered to God expresses [the power of prayer] when he says, *Let my prayer ascend as incense in your sight.*[11] The myrrh indicates the mortification of our bodies, whence holy Church says of its workmen who strive even unto death on behalf of God, *My hands dripped with myrrh.*[12] And so we too offer gold to the new-born king if we shine in his sight with the brightness of the wisdom from on high; we offer him incense if we enkindle on the altar of our hearts the thoughts of our human minds by our holy pursuit of prayer, so as to give forth a sweet smell to God by our heavenly desire; we offer him myrrh if we mortify the vices of our bodies by our self-denial. Myrrh brings it about, as I have said, that dead bodies do not decompose. For a dead body to decompose is the same as for this human body of ours to become a slave to the decay of dissoluteness, as is said of some by the prophet: *The pack animals have decomposed in their own dung.*[13] Truly pack animals decompose in their own dung when fleshly-minded persons end their lives in the stench of dissoluteness. Therefore we are offering myrrh to God when we use [the spice of self-restraint] to keep this earthly body of ours from decomposing through dissoluteness.

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[10] Pr 21:20 (LXX)

The Magi indicate something important to us by their returning to their own country by another way. By doing what they were advised to do they suggest to us what we should do. Paradise is our country. We are forbidden to return to it, once we have known Jesus, by the way by which he came. Indeed we left our country by being proud, by being disobedient, by pursuing visible things, by tasting forbidden food; we must return to it by weeping, by being obedient, by rejecting visible things and by curbing our bodily appetites. And so we return to our country by another way: pleasure led us away from the joys of paradise, sorrows summon us to return.

Hence, dearly beloved, we must always be fearful and alert, setting before the eyes of our hearts on the one hand

[11] Ps 141 (140):2 [12] Sg 5:5 [13] Joel 1:17

the sinfulness of our works, and on the other the severity of the final judgement. Consider how severe a judge is coming. He threatens sinners with terrors, and yet he still bears with them; and he puts off coming for this reason, that he may find fewer to condemn. Let us punish our sins with tears, and with the voice of the psalmist let us anticipate his presence by admitting our guilt.[14] Don't be deceived by beguiling pleasures, don't be led astray by barren joys. The judge who said, *Woe to you who laugh now, because you will mourn and weep,*[15] is near. Solomon says in this regard: *Laughter will be mingled with sorrow, and mourning follows at the end of joy;*[16] and again: *I have accounted laughter as an error and said to joy, Why do you deceive in vain?*[17] and again: *The heart of the wise is where there is sadness, and the heart of fools where there is happiness.*[18]

Let us fear the commandments of God if we would truly celebrate a feast of God. Distress over sin is a pleasing sacrifice to God, according to the psalmist who says: *An afflicted spirit is a sacrifice to God.*[19] Our past sins were forgiven when we received baptism; since baptism we have committed many sins, even though we cannot be cleansed again by the water of baptism. Therefore because we have defiled our lives even after baptism, let us baptize our conscience with our tears. Since we are seeking our country again by another way, let us who departed from it in frivolity return to it in bitter anger at our sins. Let us do this with the help of our Lord, who lives and reigns with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.

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[14] Ps 95 (94):2
[15] Lk 6:25
[16] Pr 14:13
[17] Qo 2:2
[18] Qo 7:4
[19] Ps 51:17 (50:19)

NOTES

1. Homily 10 in Migne (*PL* 1110). This particular Gospel passage is specified in all three Gospel books, N, Bu and W, as the one to be read on the feast of the Epiphany, January 6, a fact that is evident from the homily itself.
2. It would appear that Gregory, in this section about the influence of the stars over man's destiny, was influenced at least partially by Saint Augustine's short treatise, *Against Faustus the Manichean* 2,5 (*PL* 42: 211-13), his book *On Heresies* 70, 1 (*CC* 46: 333, 57-334, 15), and his *Sermon* 190, 1 (*PL* 38: 1007) and *Sermon* 199, 2 (*PL* 38: 1027-28).
3. The use of the example of the twins Esau and Jacob, who were born practically simultaneously, to demonstrate the fact that the stars cannot influence the lives of human beings because the outcome of the lives of these two was quite different, is also to be found in Saint Augustine's *City of God* 5,4 (*CC* 47: 131, 1-17).
4. This section on astrologers and their interpretation of the signs of the zodiac is likewise to be found, in a somewhat different form, in Saint Augustine's book *On Heresies* 70, 1 (*CC* 46: 334, 15-19).
5. The ancient Gaetulia was a district of northwestern Africa that is now within the borders of Morocco.
6. This allegorical significance of the gold, incense and myrrh is also to be found in Saint Augustine, *Sermon* 202, 2 (*PL* 38: 1034).

homily 9

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field. When a person has found it, he hides it and for joy goes and sells all he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is a like a merchant seeking expensive pearls. When he found one pearl of great price he went and sold everything he had and bought it. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net cast into the sea that gathered in every kind of fish. When it was full, they pulled it to shore and sat down and gathered the good into vessels but threw the bad away. So will it be at the end of the age: the angels will come forth and separate the evil from the just, and cast them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Jesus said to them, 'Have you understood all these things?' They said to him, 'Certainly, Lord'. Then he said to them, 'Therefore, every scribe who has been instructed in the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old.'

(Matthew 13: 44–52)[1]*

We say that the kingdom of heaven, dearly beloved, is like earthly things for this reason, that the mind may rise from what it knows to what it does not know. From the example of visible things it may be transported to invisible things; and warmed, so to speak, by what it has learned from experience, it may be set aglow, and learn [from what it does know] to love things both known and unknown.

See how the kingdom of heaven is compared to a treasure hidden in a field. Someone finds and hides it, and in his joy goes and sells everything he has and buys that field. We should note that the treasure, once discovered, is hidden to protect it. It is not enough to guard our pursuit of heavenly delight from wicked spirits if we do not hide it from human praise. In this present life we are, as it were, on the road by which we proceed to our homeland. Wicked spirits lie in wait along our route like highway men. Those who carry their treasure openly on the road are asking to be robbed.

I don't say this, however, that our neighbors may not see our good works, since it is written, *That they may see your good works and glorify your father,*[1] but that we may not seek praise from outside for what we do. We must let our work be in the open in such a way that our intention remains secret. Then we provide an example to our neighbors from our good work, and yet by the intention by which we seek to please God alone we always choose secrecy. The treasure is heavenly delight, and the field in which the treasure is hidden is the discipline of the pursuit of heaven. One who renounces the pleasures of the body and conquers all earthly desires by observing the heavenly discipline, so that nothing his body favors is agreeable any longer, and his spirit no longer fears anything that might destroy his bodily life, is truly one who sells everything and buys the field.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is said to be like a merchant who is seeking fine pearls and finds one of great value. Having found it, he sells everything and buys it, because whoever knows perfectly, as far as anyone can, the sweetness of the heavenly life, freely abandons everything that he has loved on earth. In comparison with it everything appears worthless. He abandons what he has, gives away the things he has accumulated. His mind is enkindled by heavenly things, and nothing earthly pleases him. Whatever earthly thing used to please him by its beauty appears hideous, because only the precious pearl gleams in his mind. Solomon justly says of such love, *Love is strong as death,*[2] because just as death[2*] destroys the body, so ardent desire for eternal life cuts off the love of material things. It renders one whom it has perfectly taken hold of insensible to earthly desires which come from without.

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[1] Mt 5:16 [2] Sg 8:6

The holy woman whose festival we celebrate today would not have been able to die for the Lord if her heart had not already been dead to earthly desires. Her mind was raised to the summit of courage; she laughed at tortures, and scorned bribes. She came before armed kings and rulers, and was stronger than her killer, more exalted than her judge, as she stood there. What can we men, fully-grown but weak, who are overcome by anger, inflated by pride, disquieted by ambition, corrupted by pleasure, when we see young women sent by the sword to the kingdom of heaven? We may not be able to attain the kingdom through battle and persecution, but let us be ashamed, that we are unwilling to follow God even in times of peace. At present God is not saying to any of us, Die for me, but Just put to death the unlawful desires within you! Would we give our bodies for the Lord in time of war, when we are not willing to subdue their desires in time of peace?

Again, the kingdom of heaven is said to be like a net let down into the sea, gathering all kinds of fish. When full it is brought to shore, and the good fish are sorted into baskets, but the bad ones are thrown away. Our holy Church is compared to a net, because it has been entrusted to fishermen, and because all people are drawn up in it from the turbulent waters of the present age to the eternal kingdom, lest we drown in the depths of eternal death. This net gathers all kinds of fish because it calls to forgiveness of sins everyone, wise and foolish, free and slave, rich and poor, brave and weak. Hence the psalmist tells God: *Every human being will come to you.*[3] This net will be completely filled when it enfolds the entire number of the human race at the end of time. The fishermen bring it in and sit down on the shore, because just as the sea signifies this present age, so the shore signifies its end. At the end of

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3. Ps 65:2 (V 64:3)

this present age the good fish are to be sorted into baskets, and the bad ones thrown away, because then all the elect will be received into eternal dwellings, and the condemned will be led away into external darkness, since they have lost the light of the kingdom within them. Now the net of the faith holds good and bad all together, like the different kinds of fish; but on the shore is revealed to the holy Church what she has been drawing in. The fish, when they have been caught, cannot be changed; but we, who are caught while we are wicked, can become good. Let us bear this in mind as we are in the process of being caught, lest we be thrown aside on shore.

See how joyous is today's solemnity for you. It would be a great deal more so if some of your assembly did not happen to be absent. What is the person going to do on that day who is snatched away out of the judge's sight, who is separated from the company of the elect, who goes from the light into darkness, who is tortured with eternal burning? Hence the Lord also discloses the substance of this separation when he adds: *So will it be at the end of the age; the angels will come forth and separate the evil from the midst of the righteous and cast them into a fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.* This, dearly beloved, we must fear rather than explain. The torments of those who sin are set forth clearly, so that no one may plead ignorance as an excuse, which might happen if what was [said about eternal punishment] was obscure.

Next we read: *'Have you understood all these things?' They said to him, 'Certainly, Lord'. And he concludes: 'Therefore every scribe who has been instructed in the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings forth from his treasure things new and old.'* If by the new and old we understand the two testaments, we cannot say that Abraham was instructed, since though he knew the facts of the new and old testaments, he was ignorant of the words. Nor can we compare Moses to an instructed householder, for although he produced part of the old testament, yet he was ignorant of the sayings of the new. Therefore since we cannot use this explanation we must try another. What the Truth means by saying that, *'Every scribe who has been instructed in the kingdom of heaven is like a householder,'* can be understood as referring not to those who have been, but about those who could have been, in the Church. They bring forth things new and old, then, when by their words and actions they declare the statements of the two testaments.

But we can understand this in another way too. Under the old law, the [human race] descended into the regions of the lower world, to suffer eternal punishments for its sins. But something was changed by the coming of the Mediator: if human beings try to live righteously, we can enter the kingdom of heaven, and, even though earth-born, can depart from this perishable life and be given a place in heaven. What is *old* is that the human race was perishing because of the ancient punishment and what is new is that when it is converted it can live in the kingdom.

And so we see that the Lord concluded his discourse as he began it. First he likened the treasure discovered in a field, and the pearl of great value, to the kingdom; then he spoke of the punishments of the lower world, and the burning of the wicked; and added in conclusion, *'Therefore the scribe who has been instructed in the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings forth from his treasure things new and old,'* [In our holy Church,] that preacher is instructed who knows how to bring forth new things about the delightfulness of the kingdom, and to tell the old things about the terrors of punishment. Then [those whom the rewards do not entice] may at least be put in dread of the punishments.

Let each one hear about the kingdom things that he loves, and let each one hear about the punishment things that he fears. Fear then may threaten the mind that is slothful and strongly clinging to the earth, if love does not attract it to the kingdom. See how in the description of hell it is said that *'there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'* Since perpetual sorrow follows present joy, flee from fruitless happiness here, dearly beloved, if you fear to weep there. No one can rejoice here with the world, and reign there with the Lord. Accordingly, hold back from the temporal joys that pass, and completely overcome the pleasures of the body. Allow whatever in the present world causes your minds to become bitter when you reflect on the eternal fire, let the judgment of adult discipline restrain whatever produces childish gratification in your minds. Then, while you willingly flee temporal joys, you may seize without labor those that last forever.

NOTES

1. Homily 11 in Migne (*PL* 1114). This particular Gospel passage is appointed by W to be used both for the festival day [*natalicia*] of Saint Prisca, January 18, and that of Saint Agnes, January 21. But the mention in the course of the homily of the spiritual strength of a young girl in the face of cruel torture would lead one to presume that it was delivered on the latter occasion.
2. The final clauses of this sentence, and the next sentence, were used by Bede in his *Commentary on the Song of Songs* (*CC* 119B: 374, 580/83).

homily 10

The kingdom of heaven will be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise and five were foolish. The foolish ones took no oil with them, but the wise ones took oil in their flasks with their lamps. While the bridegroom delayed, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight a cry went up, 'Look, the bridegroom is coming, go forth to meet him'. Then all the virgins got up and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps have gone out.' But the wise replied, 'No, or there will not be enough for us and for you. Go instead to those who sell it and buy some for yourselves.'

But while they went to buy, the bridegroom came. Those who were ready entered with him to the marriage, and the door was closed. Later the other maidens came, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open for us'. But he answered, 'I do not know you'. Therefore, be watchful, because you do not know the day or the hour when the Son of man arrives.

(Matthew 25:1-13)[1]*

I frequently advise you , dearly beloved, to flee evil works and to avoid the corruption of this world. But today's lesson from the holy Gospel compels me to say that you should be very fearful and circumspect about the good things you do. Otherwise you may be seeking human good will and thanks in your upright deeds, and a desire for praise may creep in and deprive what appears outwardly of its inward reward. In the words of our Redeemer, there were ten virgins. All of them are called virgins, and yet not all were received within the doors of blessedness, since some of them sought the external honor of virginity although they were unwilling to have oil in their flasks.

We must first ask what the kingdom of heaven is, and why it is compared to ten virgins, some of whom are called wise and some foolish. We know that none of the condemned enters the kingdom of heaven, and so why is it likened to the foolish virgins as well? But we must be aware that often in the sacred scriptures the Church of the present time is called the kingdom of heaven. In another place the Lord says: *The angels will come and gather in all causes of sin from the kingdom of my Father,*[1] although in that kingdom of blessedness, in which there is the greatest peace, there will be no causes of sin to be gathered in. Again it is said: *But whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and so teaches others' will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever observes and teaches* [*them*] *will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.*[2] In fact, anyone who preaches in words what he does not fulfill in his life is breaking a commandment and so teaching others. But no one who won't fulfill through his works what he is teaching can reach the kingdom of eternal blessedness. How will such a person, then, be called least in it, when he is not allowed ever to enter it? Accordingly, what does this passage mean by 'the kingdom of heaven' but the Church of the present time? The teacher who breaks a commandment is called least in the Church since his life is contemptible and therefore his teaching is despised.

Everyone exists by the five senses of the body, and twice five is ten; and because the entire number of the faithful is gathered in from the two sexes, the holy Church is said to be like ten virgins. And because in the Church the wicked are mingled with the good, and the condemned with the elect, it can be said to be like wise and foolish virgins. There are very many who are chaste, and keep themselves from external desires, and are attracted to interior things by hope. They mortify their bodies; with their whole desire they pursue their homeland on high, they seek eternal rewards, they decline to receive human praise for their labors. Surely these do not put their glory in the mouths of other persons, but they conceal it within their own consciences. And there are many who afflict their bodies through abstinence, but in this abstinence they are seeking for human approval. They are devoted to teaching, they bestow much on the needy; but they are foolish virgins, because they seek only the recompense of fleeting praise.

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[1] Mt 13:41 [2] Mt 5:19

Hence it is appropriately that there is added: *The five foolish ones took no oil with them, but the wise ones took oil in their flasks with their lamps.* The brightness of glory is signified by the oil, and the small containers are our hearts, in which we carry all that we think. The wise virgins have oil in their flasks, because they keep the brightness of glory within their consciences. So Paul testified when he said: *Our glory is this, the witness of our conscience.*[3] But the five foolish virgins take no oil with them, because when they seek glory from the mouths of their neighbors they do not have it within their consciences. We must note that they all have lamps, but not all have oil. Frequently the condemned also show good works within themselves, just like the elect, but they alone come to the bridegroom with oil who look for inner glory from the things which they do exteriorly. Hence the psalmist says of the holy Church of the elect: *All the glory of the king's daughter is from within.*[4]

While the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. While the judge puts off coming for the final judgment, the elect and the condemned are quiet in the sleep of death.[2*] To sleep is indeed to die, but to slumber before one sleeps is to decline in health before death , because it is through the burden of illness that one comes to the sleep of death.

At midnight a cry arose: 'See, the bridegroom is coming; go forth to meet him.' A cry concerning the bridegroom's coming arose at midnight, because the day of judgment approaches so silently that its coming cannot be foreseen.

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[3] 2 Co 1:12 [4] Ps 45:13 (V 44:14)

Hence it is written: *The day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.*[5] Then all the virgins arise, because the elect and the condemned are awakened from their sleep of death; they trim their lamps, because they count the works for which they expect to receive eternal blessedness. The lamps of the foolish virgins go out, because their works, which appeared outwardly evident to people at the judge's coming, are hidden within; and they find no recompense from God, because they have received from men the praises which they loved. What does it mean that they then request oil from the wise, except that at the judge's coming they seek external testimony when they find that they are empty within. It is as if they were to address their neighbors, when they find that they have been deluded in their confidence: 'Because you see that we are being rejected like persons without works, speak of our works, which you have seen.' But the wise virgins say in reply: *'No, there will not be enough for us and for you.'* On that day—I say this only of certain persons who are asleep in the peace of the Church—each individual's testimony is scarcely sufficient for himself. How much less will it be enough for himself and his neighbor?

The wise virgins add here by way of rebuke: *'Go rather to those who sell and buy some for yourselves.'* Those who sell oil are people who are obsequious. When they receive any kind of favor, by their meaningless praises they offer a show of glory as if they were selling oil. The psalmist says of this oil: *But let not the oil of a sinner anoint my head.*[6] Our head is our ruling member, and by speaking of the head he means the mind which rules the body. The oil of a sinner anoints the head when the good will of an obsequious person flatters the mind.

But when they went to buy, the bridegroom came. While they are seeking a witness to their life from among their neighbors, the judge, who is a witness not only of works but also of hearts, comes. *Those who were ready entered with him to the marriage, and the door was closed.* If my hearers could only feel within them the wonder of the words, *the bridegroom came,* the sweetness of, *they entered with him to the marriage,* the bitterness of, *the door was closed*!

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[5] 1 Th 5:2 [6] Ps 141:5 (V 140:5)

In truth he comes, who shakes the elements by his coming, in whose sight heaven and earth tremble. Hence the prophet says: *There is still a little while and I will move not only the earth but also the sky.*[7] He will bring the whole human race to his examination; angels, archangels, thrones, principalities and dominations will obey him, for the punishment of the evil and the recompense of the good. Consider, dearly beloved, what terror there will be on that day at the sight of so great a judge. There will be no relief from punishment then. What a shame will we feel in the sight of all human beings and angels because of our own guilt! How we will fear when we see him angry, whom the human mind cannot comprehend even when he is peaceful! When the prophet saw this day, he said: *That day will be a day of wrath, a day of distress and agony, a day of ruin and misery, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and hurricanes, a day of trumpet blast and uproar.*[8] Consider, my friend, how harsh for the hearts of the wicked the prophet saw that the day of judgment would be. He could not find enough words to describe it. But how great will be the happiness of the elect, those who will be found worthy to rejoice when they see him! At sight of him they observe all the elements trembling; and they are to enter marriage together with him. They rejoice at the bridegroom's marriage; and yet they themselves are the bride. In the bridal chamber of the eternal kingdom God is joined to our sight; and this sight will never be parted from the embraces of his love.

Then the door of the kingdom, which only today was open to those who repent, will be closed to those who wail. Even then there will be repentance, but it will be fruitless.

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[7] Hg 2:6, 21; Heb 12:26

[8] Zp 1:15–16

No one will find pardon then, who squanders the time appropriate for it. Because of this Paul said: *See, now is the acceptable time, see, now is the day of salvation;*[9] the prophet: *Seek for the Lord while he can be found, call upon him while he is near.*[10]

Hence the Lord does not hear the same foolish virgins when they call upon him. Once the door of the kingdom has been shut, they have lost their chance to be near him. And then he added: *Last of all the rest of the virgins also came, saying: 'Lord, Lord, open to us.' But he said in reply: 'Truly I say to you, I do not know you.'* No one who was unwilling to listen to his precepts here will there be found worthy to receive what he asks for. It is in vain the one who has squandered the time suitable for repentance comes before the door of the kingdom with his entreaties. The Lord says through Solomon: *I have called, and you have refused to listen; I have stretched out my hands, and there was no one who would look; you have rejected all my advice and ignored my reproofs. I will laugh at your destruction, and mock when that which you feared comes upon you, when sudden ruin overwhelms you, and destruction comes upon you like a storm; when distress and difficulty come over you. Then they will call upon me and I will not listen, they will arise early in the morning and will not find me.*[11] You see how they cry out that it be opened for them; driven on by sorrow at their rejection, they call twice upon him who has dominion over them, saying *'Lord, Lord, open to us.'* They offer entreaties, but they are unknown to him. God abandons them as unknown persons. He does not recognize them now because of their sins.

A general encouragement to the disciples now follows: *Therefore be watchful, because you do not know the day or the hour.* Since God accepts repentance after we sin, if each one knew at what time he would depart from this world, he would be able to select a time for pleasure and another time for repentance. But the one who promised pardon to a person who repents did not promise us a tomorrow. There-

[9] 2 Co 6:2 [10] Is 55:6 [11] Pr 1:24-28

fore we must always dread the final day, which we can never foresee. We receive this very day on which I am talking to you as a day of respite for conversion, and yet we refuse to weep for the evils we have committed, we even increase the things we have to weep for. But if some illness reproves us, if signs of illness reveal that our death is near, we seek a respite while we are still living, that we may weep for our sins. We beg for it with great fervor and desire, while now we disregard what has been offered.

I tell you a story now, my friends. If you listen carefully you may find it instructive. There was a nobleman in the province of Valerii[3]* by the name of Chrysaurius. The people in their rustic tongue usually called him Chryserius. He was a well connected man, but had as many vices as he had possessions. He was swollen with pride, subject to the pleasures of his body, and burning with avarice for the increase of his possessions. But I learned from a certain religious man, a relative of his who is still surviving, that when the Lord had settled on bringing an end to so many evils, he struck him down with an illness. As his end was coming, at the very time he was about to leave his body, he saw clearly with his eyes dreadful black spirits standing before him, threatening to snatch him away to the dungeons of the lower world. He began to tremble, to grow pale, to perspire; he sought a respite in a loud voice. He called his son Maximus by name—when I was a monk I saw Maximus also a monk—with extremely loud and disturbed shouts, saying: 'Maximus, hurry! I never did you wrong! Receive me under your protection.' Maximus came quickly, and the family gathered, weeping and wailing loudly. They were unable to see the wicked spirits who were tormenting him as they pressed in upon him, but from his disturbed condition, his pallor and trembling, they could sense the presence of those dragging him down. In his trepidation at the dreadful sight he was turning this way and that upon his bed. He lay on his left side, and could not bear the sight of them; he turned toward the wall but they were present there. Constrained and in despair of being able to be freed, he began to shout in a loud voice: 'A respite at least until tomorrow, a respite until tomorrow!' But while he was shouting, while he was saying these very words, he was snatched away from his body.

It is surely clear from this that he saw these things for our sake and not for his own. His vision may help us for whom the divine patience still waits with forbearance. What advantage was it to him to have seen the dreadful spirits before his death, and to have sought a respite which he did not receive? Dearly beloved, let us think carefully about these matters. We must not let our time pass by uselessly, and seek to live well only when we are being forced to go forth from our bodies. Remember what Truth says: *Pray that your flight not be in the winter or on the sabbath.*[12] The commandment of the law does not allow us to walk far on the sabbath;[13] and winter is a difficult time for walking, because the stiffness caused by the cold limits our steps. He tells us, *Pray that your flight no be in the winter or on the sabbath,* meaning: 'See that you don't seek to flee from your sins only when you are no longer allowed to walk.' We must ponder the time when we are not allowed to flee while we are allowed. We must keep the hour of our departure always in mind; we must always keep before our eyes the counsel of our Redeemer: *Therefore be watchful, because you do not know the day or the hour.*

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[12] Mt 24:20 [13] Ex 16:29

NOTES

1. Homily 12 in Migne (*PL* 1118). The Gospel pericope is noted in W as the one to be used for commemorating the passion of Saint Agnes, January 21, or for the festival day of Saint Agatha, February 5. There is nothing in the text of the homily itself to indicate on which of these two days it might have been used.
2. The idea that those who die before the general judgment are asleep, or in a state of suspended animation, was quite prevalent among the early scripture commentators.
3. This story is repeated, in almost the same words, by Gregory in his *Dialogues* 4:38. However, recent research has tended to prove that the four books of the *Dialogues* were not written by Gregory but issued under his name by an unknown author later in the seventh century. There are eight passages in the Gospel homilies (namely, numbers 10, 11 and 12 of the first book, numbers 35, 36, 37, 38 and 40 of the second book) plus similar stories not given in the *Dialogues* in homilies 34 and 39 of the second book. See particularly Francis Clark, *The Pseudo-Gregorian Dialogues*, 2 vols. (Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1987).

homily 11

The kingdom of heaven is like a householder who went out early in the morning to hire workmen for his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the workmen for a penny a day, he sent them into the vineyard. And he went out about the third hour and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and he said to them, You go into the vineyard too, and I will give you whatever is fair. And they went their way. Again, he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did the same.

And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing idle and said to them, 'Why do you stand here the whole day idle?' They said, 'Because no one has hired us'. He said to them, 'You go out into the vineyard, too, and whatever is fair you will receive.'

So when evening came, the lord of the vineyard said to his steward, 'Call the workmen and give them their wages, going from the last to the first'. And when those hired about the eleventh hour came they received each one a penny. But when the first came, they supposed they should receive more, and they likewise received each one a penny. And when they had received it they muttered against the owner saying, 'These last have worked only one hour and you've made them equal to us who bore the burden and day's heat'. But he told one of them, 'Friend, I do you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a penny? Take what is yours and go your way. I will give this last what I gave you. Is it not lawful for me to do what I choose with my own goods. Or is your eye evil because I am good?' So the last will be first and the first last. For many are called, but few are chosen.

(Matthew 20:1–16)[1]*

The reading from the holy Gospel requires an expanded discourse by way of explanation, but I wish to treat it briefly, if I can, so that you may not feel burdened by a lengthy development and extended commentary. The kingdom of heaven is said to be like a householder who hired workmen to cultivate his vineyard. Who can we better take to be the householder than our Creator, who rules over those he created, and governs his elect in the world in the same way as a master does those subject to him in his house? He has a vineyard, that is to say the universal Church, which has brought forth many saints as so many branches, from righteous Abel[2]* up to the last of the elect who will be born at the end of the world.

The householder hired workmen to cultivate his vineyard, in the morning, and at the third, sixth, ninth and eleventh hours, since preachers do not cease to preach for the instruction of the faithful from the beginning of this world up to its end. The morning indeed was from Adam[3]* to the time of Noah, the third hour from the time of Noah to the time of Abraham, the sixth from the time of Abraham to the time of Moses, the ninth from the time of Moses to the coming of the Lord; and the eleventh is from the coming of the Lord to the end of the world. In this period the holy apostles, who received a full reward even though they came late, have been sent as preachers. At no time, then, did the Lord cease sending his people workmen to instruct them, to cultivate his vineyard, as it were. When he first cultivated his people through the patriarchs, and later through the teachers of the law, and then through the prophets, and at last through the apostles, he labored at the cultivation of his vineyard as if by his workmen. Everyone, though, who had the right faith with good works, in whatever capacity or measure, was a workman in his vineyard. And so the Hebrew people is meant by the workmen who came to the vineyard in the morning and during the third, sixth and ninth hours. In the persons of their elect, they eagerly worshipped God with right faith from the very beginning of the world; and they did not cease from laboring in the cultivation of his vineyard.

The Gentiles were called at the eleventh hour, and it was said to them: *'Why do you stand here the whole day idle?'* Those who neglected to labor for the whole of their lives, while so much of the world's history passed by, were like those standing the whole day. But consider, my friends, what they answered when they were questioned. *They said: 'Because no one has hired us'.* In truth no patriarch and no prophet had come to them. And did they mean when they said, *'No one has hired us* to labor,' if not 'No one has preached to us the ways of life'? What, then, are we to say, to excuse ourselves for our having ceased from good works? We have come to the faith almost from our mothers' wombs, we have heard the words of life from our cradles, we have received divine preaching from the breasts of holy Church together with our mothers' milk!

But we can also apply these same hourly periods to each individual person's life. Morning is the childhood of our understanding. The third hour can be taken as our youth, because the sun is advancing on high as the impetuosity of age increases. The sixth hour is that of young adulthood, because when we reach our full strength it is as if the sun is in the center of the heavens. The ninth hour we take to be old age, because like the sun descending from its zenith, this age lacks the warmth of youth. The eleventh hour is the age that is called infirm or old, and so the Greeks call people who are very old not *gerontas*[4*] but *presbyterous,* to indicate that those who are very advanced in age are more than old men.

Since then one person is brought to a good life in childhood, another in youth, another in young adulthood, another in old age, another at the age of infirmity, it is as if workmen are being called to the vineyard at different hours. Look at your conduct, my friends, and see if you are still God's workmen. Let everyone reflect on what he is doing, and consider whether he is laboring in the Lord's vineyard.

No one who seeks his own will in this life has come to the Lord's vineyard. The Lord's laborers are those who think not of their own concerns but of the Lord's, who live lives of devotion with charitable zeal, who are intent on gaining souls, who hasten to bring others with them to life. One who lives for himself, nourished by the pleasures of his body, is rightly reproved as idle, since he is not striving for the fruit of good works. One who has neglected to live for God up to the last period of his life has stood idle, as it were, up to the eleventh hour. So it is aptly said to those who have stood lazily by up to the eleventh hour, *'Why do you stand here all day idle?'* meaning, 'Even though you have not been willing to live for God in your childhood and young adulthood, at least come to your right mind in the final time of your life. Come to the ways of life, even though you will not labor much now, and are late.'

The householder calls even these. And frequently they are the first to be rewarded, because by leaving their bodies quickly they arrive at the kingdom before those who appear to have been called in their childhood. Did not the thief come at the eleventh hour?[1] He possessed nothing by the length of his life, but he had something, coming late though it did, by his punishment. He confessed God on the cross, and he gave forth his last breath almost as he spoke. The householder began paying the denarius beginning with the last, because he called the thief to the repose of paradise before he called Peter. How many ancestors we had before the law, how many under the law; and yet those who were called at the Lord's coming reached the kingdom of heaven without any delay. Those who labored at the eleventh hour received the same denarius, which they awaited with their whole desire, as those who labored at the first hour, because those who come to the Lord at the end of the world will obtain an equal recompense of life with those who were called from its beginning.

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[1] Lk 23:39-43

'These last have worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day's heat.' Those whose lot it was to live here from the beginning of the world bore the burden of the day's heat, because they had to endure the temptations of the body for a longer time. To bear the burden of the day's heat means for each individual to be exhausted by the passions of his body throughout a long life.

But we can ask why those who were called, even though late, to the kingdom are said to murmur. No one who murmurs receives the kingdom of heaven, and no one who receives it can murmur. Our ancestors up to the Lord's coming, however righteous their lives, were not let into the kingdom until he came down, who by his death opened up paradise that had been closed to the human race. Their murmuring means that they lived in such a way as to obtain the kingdom, and yet were kept for a long time from obtaining it. That they attained a place in the lower world, a peaceful place, after having lived righteously, means that they labored in the vineyard and also murmured. They received their denarius after murmuring, so to speak, because they arrived at the joys of the kingdom only after a long period spent in the lower world. We who come at the eleventh hour do not murmur after our labor, and we receive a denarius. After our Mediator's coming into the world, we are led to the kingdom as soon as we leave the body; we obtain with no delay what our ancestors merited to obtain only after waiting a long time.

The householder said to them: *I wish to give to this last one as I give even to you.* And since the obtaining of his kingdom comes from his good will, he properly adds: *Or am I not allowed to do what I wish?* It is always foolish to question the goodness of God. There might have been reason for loud complaint if he did not give what he owed, but not if he gives what he does not owe. And so he adds: *Or is your eye evil because I am good?*

But no one should boast of his work or of his time, when after saying this Truth cries out: *So the last will be first, and the first last.* We know what good things we have done and how many they are; do not know with what exactitude our judge on high will investigate them. Indeed we must all rejoice exceedingly to be even the last in the kingdom of God.

But what follows after this is dreadful. *For many are called, but few are chosen,* many come to the faith, and only a few are brought to the heavenly kingdom. See how many have gathered for today's celebration; we fill the church! But yet who knows how few may be numbered in the flock of God's elect. All voices shout 'Christ', but not everyone's life shouts it. Many follow God with their voices, but flee from him by their conduct. Paul says: *They profess that they know God, but they deny him by their deeds;*[2] and James: *Faith without works is worthless;*[3] and the Lord says through the psalmist: *I have made them known and I have spoken; they have been increased more than I can count.*[4] At the Lord's call the faithful were increased more than he could count, because they also come to the faith who do not belong to the number of the elect. In this world they mingle with the faithful through their confession of faith, but in the next they do not merit to be counted in the ranks of the faithful because of their wicked way of life. The sheepfold of our holy Church receives goats together with lambs, but as the Gospel bears witness, when the judge comes he will separate the good from the evil as a shepherd sets the sheep apart from the goats.[5] Those who are subject to the pleasures of their bodies here cannot be counted as sheep there. The judge will separate from the ranks of the humble those who now exalt themselves on the horns of pride. Those who share the heavenly faith in this life, but seek the earth with their whole desire, cannot obtain the kingdom of heaven.

You may see many of this type in the Church, dearly beloved, but you see what is going on today; but we do not know what anyone will be tomorrow. One who comes after us may frequently pass us by through the swiftness of his good works; tomorrow we may with difficulty follow one today we appear to be ahead of. When Stephen was dying for his faith, Saul was keeping watch over the clothing of those stoning him.[6] He who freed the rest for the stoning himself participated by the hands of the others; and yet because of his labors in the Church he passed by the one he had persecuted and made a martyr.

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[2] Tt 1:16 [3] Jm 2:20 [4] Ps 40:5 (V 39:6) [5] Mt 25:32

There are then two things we must consider carefully. Since there are many who are called but few who are chosen, the first thing is that no one should be presumptuous about himself. Even though he has already been called to the faith, he does not know whether he may be considered worthy of the eternal kingdom. Secondly, no one should presume to despair of a neighbor, even if he sees him steeped in vice. He does not know the riches of the divine mercy.

I tell you something, my friend, which happened recently, so that if you perceive from your hearts that you are sinners you may love the mercy of almighty God all the more. During this year a certain brother[5*] came to my monastery, which is situated next to the church of the blessed martyrs John and Paul, to lead the monastic life. He was received with faith, but he himself led the monastic life more faithfully. His brother, born of the same father and mother, followed him into the monastery in body but not in heart. Despising the life and dress of a monk, he dwelt in the monastery as a guest; and fleeing the life of the monks by his conduct, he could not withdraw from the monastery because he had no other occupation or means of sustenance. His wickedness was a burden to all, but everyone put up with him patiently out of respect for his brother. He was proud and insecure. He did not know if there was any life to follow after this present age, but he scorned anyone who

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6. Ac 7:58

wished to preach to him about this. Accordingly he lived in the monastery like a layman, frivolous in his speech, unpredictable in his movements, puffed up in mind, carelessly dressed, dissipated in his actions. But during the month of July just passed he was stricken with the plague that you know about. As he approached the end of his life he began to be assailed by the thought that he was rendering up his soul. As the rest of his body was failing, he had strength only in his breast and tongue. His brothers were present and they were supporting his departure by their prayers as far as God granted them to do so.

Suddenly he perceived a dragon coming to devour him. He began to shout in a loud voice, 'Get back, get back! I'm being given up to a dragon to be devoured, but on account of your presence it cannot do it. Why do you stop it? Give it room so it can devour me!' When his brothers urged him to mark himself with the sign of the cross, he replied with what strength he had left, and said with a loud shout: 'I want to sign myself, but I cannot. The dragon is holding me down; the foam from its mouth is spread over my face, it has me by the throat. I cannot sign myself, it is squeezing my arms together, and it has swallowed even my head!' As he was saying these things, pallid, trembling and dying, his brothers began to press on more insistently with their prayers, to help with their entreaties the poor man overwhelmed by the dragon. Suddenly he was set free! He began to shout with a loud voice, saying: 'Thanks be to God! See, it has departed, it has gone away. The dragon which took me has fled from before your prayers.'

And he soon vowed that he would serve God and be a monk, and from then until now he has been overcome with fever and beset with sorrows. He was indeed saved from death, but he has still not been fully restored to life. Because he was held by oppressive and long lasting wickedness, he is beset by oppressive ill-health. A harder fire of purification is completely consuming his hard heart, and by divinely-arranged plan a very protracted illness is entirely burning away his protracted vices. Who would have believed that he would be preserved to change his way of life? Who could have pondered enough the great mercy of God? A wicked young man at the time of his death saw the dragon he had served during his lifetime. The object of this vision was to prevent its utterly destroying his life. He would know whom he had been serving, by knowing him, might oppose him and by opposing him might overcome him. He saw the one who had held him while he was unseeing, so that afterwards he might not he held.

What tongue can describe the heart of the divine mercy? What mind is not amazed by the riches of such great love? The psalmist was thinking of these riches of divine love when he said: *My helper, I will sing a psalm to you. It is you, O God, who are my protector, my God, my mercy.*[7] Carefully weighing the labors surrounding our humanity, he called God his helper. He calls his 'protector' the one who protects us in the midst of our present distress until we come to eternal rest. But bearing in mind that God sees our evil deeds and bears with them, that he puts up with our sins and still preserves us for his rewards because of repentance, he could not just speak of God as being merciful but called him mercy itself, saying: *My God, my mercy.*

Let us then recall before our eyes the evil deeds we have done, let us consider with how much goodness God puts up with us, let us bear in mind the depth of his love. He is not only lenient toward our sins, but he even promises the heavenly kingdom to those who repent after sinning. Let each of us say from the very depths of our hearts, let us all say, *My God, my mercy.*

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[7] Ps 59:17 (V 58:18)

NOTES

1. Homily 19 in Migne (*PL* 1154). The Gospel passage may be found designated in Bu as the one to be used on Septuagesima Sunday, which until the recent liturgical reforms was the third Sunday before Lent.
2. A brief part of a sentence that was used twice by Bede, once in his *Commentary on the First Letter of John,* and again in his *Commentary on the First Letter of Peter* (CC 121: 255, 132/33; 290, 45/46).
3. This sentence, dividing time into five periods instead of the six ages found so frequently in patristic writings, was adapted by Bede for use in his *Commentary on the First Letter of Peter* (CC 121: 295, 217/23).
4. Gregory here is adding the category of *presbyterous,* 'elders', to that of *gerontas,* 'old men' (which is the Greek equivalent of the Latin *senes*) because there is no word in Latin to indicate an age beyond that of being an old man.
5. A story repeated in slightly different form at the end of homily 38, and in Gregory's *Dialogues* 4:38.

homily 12

And when many people had gathered and came to him from every city, he spoke in a parable: 'A sower went out to sow his seeds. And as he sowed, some fell by the wayside and was trodden down, and the fowls of the air ate it. And some fell on a rock and as soon as it had sprouted it withered away because it lacked moisture. And some fell among thorns and the thorns sprouted with it and choked it. And the rest fell on good ground and sprouted and bore fruit a hundredfold.' And when he had said these things, he cried, 'If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.'

And his disciples asked him, 'What does this parable mean?' And he said, 'To you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to others in parables that seeing they might not see and hearing they might not understand. Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. Those by the wayside are those who hear; then the devil comes and takes the word out of their hearts lest they believe and be saved. Those on the rock are they who, when they hear receive the word with joy and yet have no root; for a while they believe and at times of temptation fall away. And what fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard go forth and are choked with the cares and riches and pleasures of this life and bring no fruit to perfection. But that on the good ground are those who with an honest and good heart, having heard the word keep it and bring forth fruit with patience.'

(Luke 8: 4–15)[1]*

The reading from the holy Gospel which you have just heard, dearly beloved, requires not a commentary but friendly admonition. Human weakness does not presume to review what Truth has commented on in person.

But there is something you ought to consider carefully in the Lord's commentary. If I were to tell you that the seed denotes the word, the field the world, the birds demons, the thorns riches, possibly you would be reluctant to believe me. Hence the Lord himself deigned to explain[2]* what he was saying so that you would know how to seek the meaning of matters which he chose not to explain. By explaining what he said he made it clear that he was speaking figuratively, so that you would be quite certain of the meaning while, in my weakness, I was struggling to explain his figures of speech.

Who would ever believe me if I wanted to interpret the thorns as riches, particularly as thorns pierce us and riches delight us?[3]* And yet riches are thorns. They wound our minds by piercing them with thoughts of riches, and they make it bloody when they entice it to sin, as if inflicting a wound. The evangelist is our witness that in another place the Lord called them not simply riches but 'deceitful riches'.[1] And they are deceitful in that they cannot remain long with us; they are deceitful in so far as they do not relieve the poverty of our minds. The only true riches are the ones that make us rich in virtues. Therefore, dearly beloved, if you want to be rich you must love true riches. If you seek the summit of genuine honor, reach out for the heavenly kingdom. If you love the glories of rank, hasten to be enrolled in the court of the angels on high. Keep in mind the words of God which you hear. The word of God is our mind's food. When we hear this word and do not retain it in the stomach of our memories, it is as if we are taking food into an indisposed stomach, and we throw it up. We despair of the life of one who does not retain nourishment. You must fear the danger of eternal death, then, if you receive the food of holy encouragement but do not keep the words of life, the nourishment that is righteousness, in your minds.

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1. Mt 13:22

See how everything you do is transitory. You are daily hastening toward the final judgment, willing or unwilling without the intervention of any moment of time. Why then do you love what is left behind? Why do you neglect what conveys where you are going? Remember what the Lord said: *If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.*[2] Everyone present there had the ears of the body; but since he said to all who had ears, *If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear,* he surely meant the ears of the heart. Take care, then, that the word which you have received remains in the ears of your heart; take care that the seed does not fall beside the way, lest the evil spirit come and take away the word from your memory; take care that rocky ground does not receive the seed and send forth the fruit of good works without the roots of perseverance. What they hear is pleasing to many persons, and they propose to themselves the beginning of good works; but as soon as adversities begin to weary them they abandon what they have begun. The rocky ground had no moisture; it did not bring what it brought forth to fulfillment in the fruit of perseverance.

Many people, when they hear a word against avarice, loathe it. They praise contempt for all things—but as soon as they imagine what they eagerly desire they forget what they praised. Many, when they hear a word against dissipation, not only do not desire to defile their bodies, but they feel shame at such defilements as they have committed. But as soon as a beautiful body appears before their eyes, their minds are drawn toward desire as if they had never made any resolutions against these desires, and they do things they had earlier condemned when they remembered they had done them.

We often feel compunction over our misdeeds, and yet we return to them after weeping over them. So Balaam wept after he beheld the tents of the people of Israel, and he begged earnestly that he might be like them in death, saying,

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[2] Mk 4:23

Let my soul die the death of the righteous, and let my end be like theirs.[3] But as soon as his time of compunction had passed he burned with the wickedness of avarice. For a promised reward he gave counsel for the destruction of the people he wished to resemble in death, and when he refused to extinguish the source of the fire of his avarice, he forgot what had caused him to weep.

We must note that in his explanation our Lord says[4]* that cares and pleasures and riches smother. They smother[5]* because they choke our minds by the constant thoughts they arouse. When they do not allow good desires to enter the heart, it is as if they are cutting off the entry of life-giving breath. We must also note that there are two things that he joins to riches: anxieties and pleasures. Riches overwhelm our minds with care, and cause them to be dissipated by surfeit. Contrary to expectation, they make those who possess them both wretched and insecure. Pleasure cannot co-exist with wretchedness. At one time riches make us wretched because of worry for their protection, and at another time they lead us weakly to pleasures because of their abundance.

But good ground brings forth fruit in patience.[6]* The good that we do amounts to nothing if we do not also patiently endure the evils done by our neighbors. For the higher that anyone advances, the more he finds things in this world that are hard to bear. When our love for this present age declines, the adversity caused by this age increases. This is the reason we see so many people doing good and yet laboring under a heavy burden of distress. They are fleeing earthly desires, and yet heavy afflictions are wearing them out. But according to the word of the Lord they are bringing forth fruit in patience, because when they humbly accept their afflictions they afterwards, are accepted into heavenly rest.

So the grape is crushed under foot and becomes liquid wine; so the olive is pressed and squeezed and, leaving

[3] Nb 23:10

behind its lees, becomes rich oil; so grain is separated from chaff by being flailed on the threshing floor, and after it is cleaned it reaches the barn. Anyone who desires to overcome his vices fully should be eager humbly to endure his cleansing afflictions. The more the fire of tribulation has rid him of his rust, the cleaner will he come before his judge.

In the porch through which we pass to enter the church[7]* of blessed Clement, there was a certain person named Servulus. Many of you knew him as well as I. He was poor in possessions but rich in merits. A long illness had incapacitated him; from his youth right up to the end of his life he lay paralysed. Why should I say that he was unable to stand, when he could never raise himself up in his bed even to a sitting position, he could never bring his hand to his mouth, never turn himself onto his other side? His mother and his brother were there to wait on him, and whatever he had been able to get as an alms he bestowed by their hands on the poor. He did not know how to read, but he had bought for himself manuscripts of the holy scriptures, and he had all the religiously-minded persons who were friendly toward him read these to him without interruption. And so as far as was possible he learned the holy scriptures almost as well as if he had read them personally, although, as I have said, he was entirely unable to read.

Although he was always in pain, he strove to give himself to thanking God in hymns and praises day and night. But when it was time for his great patience to be rewarded, pain returned to his vital parts. Recognizing that he was now near death, he urged strangers and those who were friendly toward him to come forward and sing psalms with him as they awaited his departure. And when even as he was dying he was singing psalms with them, he stopped their voices, saying with terror in a loud voice: 'Be silent! Do you not hear the great praises resounding in heaven?' As he was directing the ear of his heart to the praises he had heard inwardly, his holy soul was released from his body. And as it went forth, so lovely a scent was spread about there that all present were filled with an unaccountable sweetness. From this they recognized clearly that the praises had received his soul into heaven. One of our monks who is still alive was present at this event. He testifies with weeping that up until they buried his body the lovely scent did not depart from their nostrils.

See the end of one who patiently put up with afflictions in his life! The good ground broken up by the plow of discipline attained a harvest of remuneration, and according to the Lord's word it brought forth fruit in patience. But I ask you, my friend, to think carefully about the sort of excuse we will make in the strict judgment. We who have received possessions and can employ hands are slow to perform good works, while a person in want fulfilled the Lord's precepts without the use of his hands. Let the Lord not show us up by the apostles, who by their preaching drew crowds of believers with them to the kingdom. Let him not manifest against us the martyrs, who reached their heavenly home by shedding their blood. What will we say when we see Servulus, of whom I have spoken? Lengthy illness restrained his arms, but did not keep him from doing good. Think of these things, my friends, and rouse yourselves to the pursuit of good works. With good people as models for you to imitate now, you may be able to be sharers in their goodness hereafter.

NOTES

1. Homily 15 in Migne (*PL* 1131). Both Bu and W establish that this was the Gospel pericope used at Rome at about this time for Sexagesima Sunday (formerly the second Sunday before Lent).
2. This sentence was adopted by Bede for his *Commentary on Luke* (*CC* 120:173, 309/12).
3. The final clause of this sentence along with the next two were taken over by Bede for use in his *Commentary on Mark* (*CC* 120:482, 1786/90). The same passage, plus the three following sentences, is also to be found in his *Commentary on Luke* (*CC* 120:176, 401/409).
4. This entire paragraph was taken over by Bede for his *Commentary on Luke* (*CC* 120:176, 409/19).

5. Two sentences used by Bede in his *Commentary on Mark* (CC 120:483, 1818/21).
6. Another paragraph adopted for use by Bede in his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120:176, 425-177, 435).
7. Gregory repeated this story in his *Dialogues* 4:14.

homily 13

Then he took the twelve and said to them: 'Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all the things that have been written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished. For he shall be delivered to the peoples and shall be mocked and treated spitefully and spat on. And they will flog him and put him to death, and the third day he shall rise again.' But they understood none of these things, and this saying was hidden from them, nor did they know the things which were spoken. And it came to pass that as he drew near to Jericho, a certain blind man sat by the wayside, begging. And hearing the crowd pass, he asked what it meant. And they told him that Jesus of Nazareth was passing. And he cried, saying, 'Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me.' And the people ahead rebuked him, that he should be silent, but he cried out even more: 'Son of David, have mercy on me.' But Jesus stopped and ordered him to be brought to him. And when he had come near he asked him, 'What do you want me to do for you?' And he said, 'Lord, that I may see'. And Jesus said to him, 'Receive your sight, your faith has saved you'. At once he saw and followed him, glorifying God. And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God.

(Luke 18:31-43)[1]*

Our Redeemer foresaw that the hearts of his disciples[2]* would be greatly disturbed by his passion. He foretold to them far ahead both the agony of his passion and the glory of his resurrection. Then when they beheld him dying, as had been foretold, they would not doubt that he was also to rise again. But since the disciples, still unspiritual as they were, were entirely unable to grasp the words of the mystery, there was need of a miracle. A blind man received the light before their eyes so that a heavenly deed might strengthen the faith of those who failed to grasp the words of the heavenly mystery.

We must understand the miracles of our Lord and Saviour, dearly beloved, so as to believe that they have been truly done, and that their meaning still signifies something to us. His works show one thing by their power, and speak to us another by their mystery. We do not know the historical identity of the blind man, but we know whom he mystically denotes. The blind man is the human race. In our first parents it was driven from the joys of paradise, and ignorant of the brightness of the divine light, it suffered the darkness of its condemnation. But yet it is enlightened by the presence of its Redeemer, to see already the joys of inward light by desire, and to direct the footsteps of its good works in the way of life.

We must note that the blind man was enlightened while Jesus is said to be drawing near Jericho. Jericho is interpreted 'moon'.[3*] In sacred scripture the moon symbolizes the weakness of our body, since as it wanes in its monthly changes it depicts the weakness of our mortal nature. The blind man came to the light when our Creator drew near Jericho, because when a divine person undertook the weakness of body the human race recovered the light that it had lost. God suffered as a human being, and humans are raised up to divinity.

The blind man is rightly described as sitting at the wayside and as begging. Truth himself told us: *I am the way.*[1] Anyone ignorant of the brightness of eternal light is blind. If he already believes in his Redeemer he is sitting at the wayside. If he already believes but only pretends to ask for eternal light, if he refrains from praying, he is indeed a blind man sitting at the wayside, but he is now begging. If he believes, and knows the blindness of his heart, if he begs to receive the light of truth, he is sitting at the wayside begging. If anyone recognizes the darkness of his blindness, if anyone understands that the light of truth is wanting in him, let him cry from the bottom of his heart, let him cry also with his whole mind, let him say: *'Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me!'*

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[1] Jn 14:6

But let us hear what happened when the blind man was crying out: *And the people ahead rebuked him, that he should be silent.* What is meant by ' the people ahead' as Jesus comes if not the crowds of bodily desires and the uproar caused by our vices? Before Jesus comes into our hearts they disturb our thoughts by tempting us, and they thoroughly muddle the words in our hearts as we pray. We often wish to be converted to the Lord when we have committed some wrong. When we try to pray earnestly against the wrongs we have committed, images of our sins come into our hearts. They obscure our inner vision, they disturb our minds and overwhelm the sound of our petition. *And so the people ahead rebuked him, that he should be silent,*because before Jesus comes into our hearts the evils we have done rise up in our thoughts as images, and they throw us into confusion in the very act of praying.

But let us hear what the blind man, still unenlightened, did. *But he cried out all the more: 'Son of David, have mercy on me.'* See how the one the crowd told to be silent cried out all the more! In proportion to the tumult of our unspiritual thoughts must be our eagerness to persist in prayer. The crowd opposes our crying out, since frequently we endure the images of our sins even in prayer. But it is surely necessary that the more harshly our heart's voice is repressed, the more firmly it must persist to overcome the uproar of forbidden thoughts and break in on our Lord's gracious ears by its intrepid perseverance. I believe that everyone observes what I am saying in himself, and herself. When we turn our minds from this world to God, when we are converted to the work of prayer, what we once enjoyed doing we later endure in our prayer as demanding and burdensome. Holy desire only with difficulty banishes the recollection of them from our hearts; the sorrows of repentance scarcely overcome their images.

But when we persist ardently in our prayer, we fix Jesus to our hearts as he passes by. Hence: *But Jesus stopped and ordered him to be brought to him.* You see how one who was passing by stopped. While we are still[4]* suffering the crowds of images in our prayer, we realize that Jesus is in some sense passing by; but when we persist ardently in prayer, Jesus stops. He revives the light, because God is fixed to our hearts, and the light we have lost is restored.

But here the Lord is suggesting something else to us, which we can profitably understand of his humanity and divinity. Jesus heard the blind man crying out as he was passing by, but standing still he manifested the miracle of enlightenment. Passing by is characteristic of his humanity, standing still his divinity. Through his humanity he was able to be born, to grow up, to die, to rise, to go from place to place. Since there is no possibility of change in his divinity, and the possibility of being changed is what is meant by 'passing by', this 'passing by' is characteristic of his humanity and not of his divinity. It pertains to his divinity to stand always still, since he is present everywhere, and neither comes nor goes by motion. The Lord heard the blind man crying out when he was passing by, but stood still to enlighten him, because it was in his humanity that he had pitied the words of our blindness and showed us mercy, but by the power of his divinity that he poured into us the light of his grace.

We must now look at what he said to the blind man as he came near: *'What do you want me to do for you?'* Was one who could[5]* restore light ignorant of what the blind man wanted? But he wants to be asked for what he already knows; we shall request and he will grant. He counsels us to be untiring in our prayers, and yet he says: *For your Father knows what you need before you request it of him.*[2] And so he questions that we may ask him, he questions to rouse our hearts to prayer.

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[2] Mt 6:8

The blind man immediately said: *'Lord, that I may see.'* The blind man does not ask the Lord for gold, but for light. He sets little store by asking anything but light, because though he can have anything at all, without light he is unable to see what he has. Let us imitate him, dearly beloved. We have heard that he was saved in both body and mind. Let us not ask the Lord for deceptive riches, or earthly gifts, or passing honors, but for light. And let us not ask for light shut up in one place, or limited by time, or ending with the coming of night. The beasts behold such light just as we do. Let us ask for the light which we can see with angels alone, light without beginning or end.

The way to this light is faith. Hence Jesus immediately says to the blind man who is to be enlightened:*'Look up, your faith has saved you.'*

Our unspiritual mind says in reply to this: 'How can I ask for spiritual light which I am unable to see? How can I be certain that it exists if it does not shine for my bodily eyes?' Everyone can make a brief reply to this thought: There are things we understand by reflecting on them not through the body but through the soul. No one sees his soul, and yet we do not doubt that we have a soul we do not see. Our visible body is ruled by an invisible soul. If what is invisible be taken away, what was visible and appeared to be lasting immediately perishes. We live in this visible life on account of an invisible substance. Can we doubt that an invisible life exists?

But let us hear what happened to the request of the blind man, and what he himself did. *At once he saw, and he followed him.* That person sees and follows[6*] who knows what is good and behaves accordingly; that one sees but does not follow who knows what is good but refuses to do it. Dearly beloved, if we acknowledge that we are blind persons on pilgrimage now, if we sit at the wayside by believing in the mystery of our Redeemer, if we ask light from our Creator by begging earnestly for it every day, if we have now been enlightened after our blindness by seeing the light by our understanding, then let us follow by our deeds the Jesus we behold with our hearts. Let us consider where he is walking, and let us follow his footsteps by imitating him. The person who imitates[7]* Jesus follows him. Thus he says: *Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead.*[3] Following means imitating. And again he gives us consent, saying, *If anyone serves me, let him follow me.*[4]

Let us then consider where he is walking, that we may be worthy to follow him. Look how although he is Lord and creator of the angels, when he was to take on himself our nature, which he created, he entered the Virgin's womb. Even then he did not will to be born in this world among the rich, but he chose for himself poor parents. There was no lamb to offer for him, but his mother found two turtledoves and two young pigeons for the sacrifice.[5] He refused to prosper in this world; he endured reproaches and mockery, he bore up under spitting, scourging, blows, a crown of thorns and a cross. Because we had fallen away from inner joy by our delight in material things, he showed with what bitterness we must return to it.

Accordingly, what must we humans not suffer on our own behalf, if God bore so much for us? If there is a person who believes in Christ, but who still pursues the gains of avarice, who is exalted by pride in honors, who burns with the flames of envy, who defiles himself with unclean desires, who eagerly desires to succeed in the things of the world, that one is refusing to follow Jesus in whom he has believed. If there is anyone to whom his Leader has shown the way of bitterness, who longs for joy and amusement, that one is walking a different route. Let us then call up before our eyes the sins we have committed, let us consider how fearful a judge will punish them, let us dispose our hearts to sorrow, let us embitter our lives for a time with repentance: then we shall not feel eternal bitterness in punishment. We are being led to eternal joys by way of weeping, as Truth promises us: *Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted.*[6] And the same Truth bears witness that through joy we come to weeping: *Woe to you who now laugh, for you will mourn and weep.*[7] If we are seeking joy when we arrive at the time of recompense, then let us hold on to the bitterness of repentance on our way there. So it will come about that not only will our lives move[8]* toward God, but our way of life here and now will arouse others to the praise of God: *And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God.*

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[3] Mt 8:22 [4] Jn 12:26 [5] Lk 2:24

6. Mt 5:5 7. Lk 6:25

NOTES

1. Homily 2 in Migne (*PL* 1082). Again, both Bu and W note that this was the Gospel pericope used at Rome at about this time for Quinquagesima Sunday (the final Sunday before Lent).
2. The three opening sentences of this homily were adopted for use by Bede in both his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120:330, 1378/82) and in his *Commentary on Mark* (CC 120:564, 883/86).
3. This meaning of the Hebrew word, Jericho, comes from a work of Saint Jerome, *Interpretation of Hebrew Names* (CC 72:137, 9).
4. Two sentences employed by Bede in his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 332, 1453/57).
5. Three paragraphs taken over by Bede for use in both his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 332, 1459/74) and in his *Commentary on Mark* (CC 120: 570, 1094/1109).
6. A sentence to be found both in Bede's *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 332, 1476/79) and his *Commentary on Mark* (CC 120: 570, 1111/13).
7. Almost the entire remaining portion of this paragraph and the next are to be found in Bede's *Commentary on Mark* (CC 120: 570, 1113/24). A brief part of it was used by him in his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 332, 1479-333, 1481).
8. The final part of this sentence, plus the following one, was used by Bede in his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 333, 1481/83).

homily 14

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, to be tempted by the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights he was hungry. And when the tempter came to him, he said, 'If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread'. But he answered and said, 'It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God'. Then the devil took him into the holy city and set him on a pinnacle of the temple and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, cast yourself down, for it is written: He shall give his angels charge over you, and they shall bear you in their hands lest at any time you dash your foot against a stone.' Jesus said to him, 'It is written again, You shall not tempt the Lord your God.' Again the devil took him up into a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world, saying, 'I will give you all these if you will fall down and worship me.' Then Jesus said to him, 'Get away, Satan. For it is written, You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.' Then the devil left him and angels came and ministered to him.

(Matthew 4: 1–11)[1]*

Certain persons are accustomed to question what spirit it was that led Jesus into the desert on account of what follows: *The devil took him into the holy city;* and again, *He took him to a very high mountain.* But we truly and perfectly rightly accept the belief that he was led by the Holy Spirit into the desert, so that his Spirit might lead him where the evil spirit could find him in order to tempt him.[2]*

But you see how when the God-man is said to have been taken by the devil either to a very high mountain or into the holy city, our minds shrink and our human ears take fright from hearing this. But[3]* if we consider other things done against him, we perceive that we can believe this in his case. The devil is the head of all the wicked, and all the wicked are members of his body. Was not Pilate one of his members? And were not the Jews who persecuted him, and the soldiers who crucified him, members of the devil?[4*] Why then should we wonder if he allowed himself to be led by him into the desert, when he suffered himself to be crucified by his members? It is not unworthy of God that he willed to be tempted when he had come to be slain. Surely it was right that he should vanquish our temptations by his temptations, just as he had come to overcome our death by his death.

We should be aware that temptation is carried[5*] out in three ways: by suggestion, by delight, and by consent. When we are tempted, we frequently fall through delight, or even through consent. Having been begotten by a sin of the body, we have within ourselves the source of the conflicts we endure. But God, who became human in the womb of the Virgin, and came into the world without sin to take to himself a body, endured no inconsistency within himself. He could therefore be tempted by suggestion, but no delight in sin took hold of his heart. This whole diabolic temptation then took place from without, not from within.

If we look at the progress of his temptation, we see how great the struggle was that set us free from temptation. Our ancient enemy rose up against the first human being, our ancestor,[6*] in three temptations. He tempted him by gluttony, by vain glory and by avarice. And he overcame him when he tempted him, because he subjugated him through consent. He tempted him by gluttony when he showed him the forbidden food of the tree, and told him: 'Taste it.' He tempted him by vain glory when he said, '*You will be like gods.*'[1] He tempted him by adding avarice when he said, '*knowing good and evil.*' Avarice is concerned not only with money but also with high position. We rightly call it avarice

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1. Gn 3:5

when we seek high position beyond measure. If grasping at honor was not related to avarice, Paul would not have said of God's only-begotten Son:*He did not think that being equal to God was something to be grasped.*[2] The devil drew our ancestor to pride by stirring him up to an avaricious desire for high position.

But the means by which he overcame the first man were the same ones which caused him to yield when he tempted the second.

He tempted him by gluttony when he said, '*Tell these stones to become bread.*' He tempted him by vain glory when he said,'*If you are the son of God, cast yourself down.*' He tempted him by an avaricious desire for high position when *he showed him all the kingdoms of the world, saying, 'I will give you all these if you will fall down and worship me.'* The second man overcame him by the same means he had boasted that he used to overcome the first man. As a captive he would depart from our hearts by the same avenue which had given him entrance when he possessed us.

But there is something else we have to consider too in this temptation of the Lord's, dearly beloved. When the Lord was tempted by the devil, he answered him with the commands of sacred Scripture. By the Word which he was, he could have plunged his tempter into the depths. He did not reveal the power of his might, but he only brought forth the precepts of Scripture. This was to give us an example of his patience, so that as often as we suffer something from vicious persons we should be aroused to teach rather than to exact revenge. Consider how great God's patience is, how great our impatience. If we are provoked by injuries, or by some attack, influenced by rage we either take vengeance for ourselves to the extent of our ability, or we threaten to do what we cannot. The Lord endured the devil's opposition, and he answered him with nothing except words of meekness. He put up with one he could have punished, so that this might all the more redound to his praise. He overcame his enemy not by destroying him but by suffering him for awhile.

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[2] Ph 2:6

But we must note that after the devil left him angels ministered to him. What else does this reveal but the two natures of his one person? He is both a human being whom the devil tempted, and God to whom the angels ministered. Let us recognize in him our nature, since the devil would only tempt one he saw was a human being; and let us venerate in him his divinity, since angels would minister only to the God who is above all

This reading is appropriate for these days. We who are beginning the forty days of Lent have heard of our Redeemer's forty days' fast. We must consider why this fast is kept for forty days. Moses fasted forty days to receive the law for the second time;[3] Elijah fasted forty days in the desert;[4] and humankind's Creator, coming to humans, took no food at all for forty days. We too, as far as we can, try every year during Lent to afflict our bodies by fasting. Why do we keep the number forty in our fasting except that the observance of the decalogue is fulfilled by the four books of the Gospel? Four times ten is forty: we complete the commandments of the decalogue when we truly keep the four books of the holy Gospel.

But we can take this in another way. Our mortal bodies consist of four elements. We contravene the Lord's commandments through the pleasures of the body. Now we received the Lord's commandments in the decalogue, and it is fitting then that we who reject the commands of the decalogue through the desires of our bodies should afflict then fortyfold.

There is something else again that we can understand about these forty days of Lent. Between today and the joys of the Easter celebration come six weeks, making forty-two days in all. When we subtract the six Sundays from this time of fasting there remain only thirty-six days. As the year is made up of three hundred and sixty days, and we afflict ourselves for thirty-six days, we are given as it were a tithe of our year to God. We who live for ourselves throughout the year we have received can then mortify ourselves for our Creator during a tenth of this time by fasting. Dearly beloved, as we are commanded to offer him a tithe of our possessions,[5] so hasten to offer him a tithe of your days as well.

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[3] Ex 34:28 [4] 1K 19:8

Let each one, as far as his strength allows, vex his body and afflict his desires. Let each one put to death his base desires, so that, in the words of Paul, he may become a living sacrificial victim.[6] A sacrificial victim is in fact put to death, and lives, when a person without leaving this life slays in himself his carnal desires. A pleasure-loving body had drawn us to sin; let an afflicted one bring us to pardon. The author of our death broke the commandments by eating the fruit of the forbidden tree of life.[7] Let us who have fallen away from the joys of paradise through food, rise up to them again, as much as we can, through fasting.

But no one should believe that this fast alone can suffice for him, the Lord says through the prophet: *I have not chosen such a fast,* instead,*Break your bread for the hungry, and bring the needy and the vagrants into your homes. If you see someone naked clothe him, and do not turn away your own kin.*[8] Fast, then, by lifting up acts of almsgiving before his eyes, by doing what you do with love of your neighbor, by being holy. What you take from yourself give to someone else so that your needy neighbor's body may be restored by the affliction of your own. The Lord says through the prophet: *When you fasted and mourned, did you fast for me? And when you eat and drink, do you not eat and drink for yourselves?*[9] He eats and drinks for himself who nourishes his body with the Creator's common gifts, without regard for the needy;

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[5] Lv 27:30 [6] Rm 12:1 [7] Gn 2:9, 17; 3:1–6 [8] Is 58:6–7
[9] Zc 7:5–6

and he fasts for himself if he does not bestow upon the poor what he takes for a time from his own use, but keeps it instead to fill his own stomach later. Hence it is said by Joel: *Sanctify a fast.*[10] Sanctifying a fast means showing bodily fasting to God as an alms, by adding every other good deed. Cease to be angry, put aside quarrels. You weaken your body in vain if you don't restrain your heart from all its pleasures. The Lord says by the prophet: *See, you find your own will on the day of your fast, and you seek all your debtors; you strike wickedly with your fist.*[11] For the one who seeks from his debtor what he has given him is not doing anything unjust; but it is fitting that anyone who vexes himself by doing penance should forego even what is justly owed him. When we afflict ourselves, and are repentant, God forgives us what we have done unjustly—if for love of him we alleviate what is justly owed us.

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10. Jl 1:14 11. Is 58:3-4

NOTES

1. Homily 16 in Migne (*PL* 1135). This Gospel pericope, which recounts the temptation of Christ according to Matthew, is assigned by all three early Gospel books, N, Bu, and W, to Lent. Traditionally it has been the Gospel for the first Sunday in Lent.
2. Evidently there was some discussion among early exegetes as to whether it was the evil spirit, the devil, who led Christ into the desert to be tempted, or the Holy Spirit. Gregory allies himself here with Saint Jerome in asserting that it was the Holy Spirit (see Saint Jerome's *Commentary on Matthew* (CC 77:19, 305/306); but in the next paragraph he contradicts himself: 'Why then should we wonder if he allowed himself to be led by him [the devil] into the desert...'.
3. The final part of this sentence, plus the next two sentences, were used by Bede in his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 96, 3024/27).
4. Three more sentences adopted for use by Bede in his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 96, 3027/32).
5. A sentence used by Bede in his *Commentary on the Letter of James* (CC 121: 188, 192/93).
6. This entire passage contrasting the temptations of Adam with the temptations of our Lord, and pointing out their similarities, was adapted by Bede for use in his *Commentary on the First Letter of John* (CC 121: 294, 179/90).

homily 15

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep. But the hireling and the person who is not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, sees a wolf coming and abandons the sheep and flees. But the hireling flees, because he is a hireling and has no concern for the sheep. I am the good shepherd and I know my sheep and am known by them. Just as the Father knows me, and I recognize the Father and lay down my life for my sheep. And I have other sheep that are not of this sheepfold; it is fitting that I also bring them in, and they will hear my voice, and there will be one sheepfold and one shepherd.

(John 10:11-16)[1]*

You have heard, my friends, in the Gospel reading something meant for your instruction; and you have heard of my danger. He whose goodness is his own nature, and not some nonessential gift, says, '*I am the good shepherd*'. He adds the character of this goodness, which we are to imitate, saying, '*The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep*'. He did what he taught, he gave an example of what he commanded. It is written, that *All flesh is hay.*[1] What is hay if not grass? The good shepherd has laid down his life for his sheep in order to change his body and blood into a sacrament for us, and to satisfy the sheep he had redeemed with his own body as food. The way of contempt for death which we are to follow has been shown us, the mould which is to form us is there. The first thing we are to do is to devote our external goods to his sheep in mercy; then, if it should be necessary, we are to offer even our death for these same sheep. From the first small step one reaches the last great one. Since the soul which gives us life is

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1. Is 40:6

incomparably more precious than the earthly substance which we possess externally, when will a person give his life for his sheep if he does not give his substance for them? There are some who, when they love their earthly substance more than the sheep, rightly lose the name of shepherd.

Of these it is immediately said: *'But the hireling and the person who is not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, sees a wolf coming and abandons the sheep and flees.'* He is called a hireling and not a shepherd because he does not pasture the Lord's sheep out of his deep love for them but for a temporal reward. That person is a hireling who holds the place of shepherd but does not seek to profit souls. He is eager for earthly advantages, rejoices in the honor of preferment, feeds on temporal gain, and enjoys the deference offered him by other people. These indeed are the rewards of a hireling. In them he finds what he is seeking, what he labors for in his governing role; and in the future he will be cut off from the inheritance coming to the flock.

But we cannot truly know whether anyone is a shepherd or a hireling if there is no occasion to test him. During times of peace even a hireling frequently stands for the protection of the flock like a true shepherd. When the wolf comes, each one shows what his intention was as he stood as protector of the flock. When any unrighteous intruder falls upon the humble believers it is a wolf coming upon the sheep. The one who appeared to be a shepherd, and was not, leaves the sheep and flees, because while he fears the danger to himself from the intruder, he does not venture to resist his unrighteousness. He does not flee by changing his place but by withholding his help; he flees because he sees his unrighteousness and is silent; he flees, who conceals himself beneath his silence. To him it is well said by the prophet: *You have not gone up in opposition nor have you built a wall of resistance for the house of Israel, to hold fast in battle on the day of the Lord.*[2] To go up in opposition means to openly rebuke any powers that behave wickedly; and we hold fast in battle for the house of Israel on the day of the Lord and build a wall of resistance, if we defend innocent believers against the unrighteousness of the wicked with the power of righteousness. Since a hireling does not do these things, he flees when he sees a wolf coming.

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[2] Ezk 13:5

But there is another wolf that ceaselessly, every day, tears apart minds, not bodies. This is the evil spirit which goes about attacking the sheepfolds of believers, seeking the death of souls. Of this wolf it is said: *'And the wolf snatches and scatters the sheep.'* The wolf comes, and the hireling flees; the evil spirit tears apart the minds of believers in temptation, and the one holding the place of shepherd does not take responsibility. Souls are perishing, and he enjoys his earthly advantages. The wolf snatches and scatters the sheep when he entices one to dissipation, inflames another with avarice, exalts another by pride, destroys another by anger, stirs one up by envy, trips up another by deceit. When the devil slays believers through temptations he is like a wolf dispersing the flock. No zeal rouses the hireling against these temptations, no love excites him. He seeks only the outward advantages and carelessly allows the inward injury to his flock.

'But the hireling flees, because he is a hireling and has no concern for the sheep.' The only reason for the hireling's fleeing is that he is a hireling. A person who is in charge of the sheep, not because he loves them but because he is seeking earthly gain, cannot make a stand when the sheep are in danger. Because he esteems honor, because he enjoys his temporal advantages, he is afraid to oppose the danger lest he lose what he loves.

But our Redeemer made known the shortcomings of a false shepherd, and showed us the mould which ought to form us: *'I am the good shepherd,'* he said, *'and I know mine, and mine know me'*. *'I know mine,'* means 'I love them'; *'and mine know me,'* means, 'Those who love are obedient.' One who does not love the truth does not yet know it.

Dearly beloved, you have heard my danger. consider in the Lord's words your own danger. See if you are his sheep, see if you recognize him, see if you know the light of truth. When I say 'know' I don't mean by faith but by love; when I say 'know' I don't mean by your belief but by your work. The same John the Evangelist who tells us this testifies that *He who says that he knows God and does not observe his commandments is a liar.*[3] Hence the Lord immediately adds here: *'Just as the Father knows me, and I recognize the Father and lay down my life for my sheep.'* He means, 'From this it is clear that I know the Father and am known by him, that I lay down my life for my sheep; by the love by which I die on behalf of the sheep I show how much I love the Father'.

And since he had come to redeem not only Jews but also gentiles, he added: *'And I have other sheep that are not of this sheepfold; it is fitting that I also bring them in, and they will hear my voice, and there will be one sheepfold and one shepherd.'*

The Lord beheld the redemption of us who come from the Gentiles when he said that he was bringing in the other sheep too. You behold this happening every day, my friends; you see today that this has happened by the reconciliation of the Gentiles. He makes one sheepfold from two flocks, so to speak, because he joins the Jewish and Gentile races together by belief in him, as Paul bears witness when he says: *He is our peace, who has made both one.*[4]

When he chooses the guileless from both races for eternal life he is leading sheep into his own sheepfold. He says truly of them: *My sheep hear my voice, I know them and they follow me; I give them eternal life.*[5] A little earlier he said of them: *Anyone who enters by me will be saved; he will go in and out, and will find pasture.*[6] He will go in to faith; he will go out from faith to vision, from belief to contemplation; he will find pasture in eternal refreshment. His sheep will find pasture because whoever follows him with a guileless heart is nourished with a food of eternal freshness. What are the

[3] 1 Jn 2:4 [4] Eph 2:14 [5] Jn 10:27-28 [6] Jn 10:9

pastures of these sheep but the eternal joys of an ever-green paradise? The pasture of the elect is the countenance of God in person. When we see him perfectly our hearts are endlessly satisfied with the food of life. Those who have evaded the traps of temporary pleasures rejoice in those pastures with the fullness of eternity. There are choirs of angels singing hymns, there the company of heavenly citizens, there the delightful festival of those returning from the sad labor of their exile here, there the far-seeing choir of prophets, there the apostles, our judges, there the victorious army of innumerable martyrs, as much happier there as they were tormented here, there confessors whose constancy is relieved by the reception of their reward, there faithful men whose manly strength was not enfeebled by the pleasures of the world, there holy women who overcame their sex together with the world, there children who surpassed their years by their conduct, there old men whom age weakened but whose capacity for action did not end.

Let us seek these pastures, dearly beloved! There we may enjoy the celebration of so many citizens. Let the festival of those who rejoice attract us. Surely where people are keeping a market-day, if a celebration were announced for the dedication of some church and people were gathering, would we not hasten to be found present at so great a celebration? All of us would be there! We would believe we had suffered a serious loss if we did not see the celebration of general happiness. The rejoicing of the chosen citizens in heaven is in progress. They all manifest their joy in turn at their gathering. Yet we are lukewarm in our love of eternity; no desire enkindles us; we do not seek to be present at so great a celebration. We are without these joys—and we are happy. Let us enkindle our hearts, my friends, let our faith grow warm again for what it believes, let our desire for heavenly things take fire. To love thus is to be already on the way. Let no adversity recall us from the joy of inner festivity: no difficulty on his journey alters the desire of a person wanting to go to some particular place. Let no seductive good fortune lead us astray: he is a foolish traveller who sees pleasant meadows on his journey and forgets where he is going. Therefore let our hearts yearn with all our desire for our heavenly home, let them desire nothing in this world which they must leave quickly. If we are truly sheep of the heavenly shepherd, and are not arrested by any delight along the way, we shall be satisfied with eternal pastures on our arrival there.

NOTES

1. Homily 14 in Migne (*PL* 1127). Although we have long been accustomed to associate this Gospel passage with the period after Easter, and in particular with the second Sunday (and indeed the eighth-century Gospel book W actually assigns this pericope to that Sunday), yet N and Bu assigns it to one of the days in the middle of Lent. Its presence in the extant manuscripts in the first book of Gregory's homilies—the second book, beginning with homily 21, seems to have been handed on as a separate group, starting with Easter Sunday and continuing with homilies for the time after Easter—might lead one to conclude that it was delivered by Gregory as a lenten homily.

homily 16

> *'Which of you convicts me of sin? And if I speak the truth, why do you not believe me? One who is of God listens to the words of God; you do not listen because you are not of God.' The Jews answered and said: 'Do we not do well to say that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?' Jesus answered, 'I do not have a demon, but I honor my Father and you have dishonored me. I seek not my own glory; there is one who seeks and judges. Truly, truly I say to you, If anyone keeps my word, he shall not see death for ever.'*
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> *Then the Jews said to him, 'Now we know you have a demon. Abraham is dead and the prophets are dead, and you say, If anyone keeps my word he shall never taste death for ever. Are you greater than our father Abraham who is dead? And the prophets who are dead? who are you making yourself to be?' Jesus answered, 'If I honor myself, my honor is nothing. It is my father who honors me, of whom you say, he is your God. Yet you have not known him, but I know him. And if I should say I do not know him, I should be a liar like you. But I do know him and keep his saying. Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it and was glad.' Then the Jews said to him, 'You are not yet fifty years old and have you seen Abraham?' And Jesus said to them, 'Truly truly, I tell you, Before Abraham was, I am.' Then they took up stones to cast at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple, going though the midst of them, and passed by.*
>
> (John 8:46–59)[1]*

Dearly beloved, consider God's meekness. He had come to forgive sins, and he asked: *'Which of you convicts me of sin?'* He who could make sinners righteous by the power of his divinity did not disdain to show the reason he was not a sinner. But what he added is terrible: *'One who is of God listens to the words of God; you do not listen because you are not of God.'* If one who is of God listens to words of God, and one who is not of him cannot listen to his words, let each of us ask himself if he perceives the words of God with the ears of his heart. Then he will understand from where he is. Truth commands us to desire our heavenly home, to trample underfoot our physical desires, to turn away from the world's praises, not to covet what belongs to another, to give of what is one's own. Let each one of you then consider within himself if this voice of God prevails in the ears of his heart: then he will recognize whether he is now of God. There are some who do not deign to listen to God's precepts with the ears of their body; there are some who listen to them with their bodily ears but who do not embrace them with their heart's desire; and there are some who freely accept the words of God so that they feel compunction even to weeping, but after the time of tears they turn back to wickedness. They do not hear the words of God who refuse to put them into practice in their deeds. Call your life before the eyes of your hearts, dearly beloved. After you seriously reflect on it, take alarm at what you hear from Truth himself: *'You do not listen, because you are not of God.'*

The condemned themselves manifest by their works what the truth says concerning them: *The Jews answered and said: 'Do we not do well to say that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?'* Let us listen to what the Lord replied after receiving such abuse: *'I do not have a demon: but I honor my Father, and you have dishonored me.'* 'Samaritan' is interpreted 'guardian',[2*] and he is truly the guardian of whom the psalmist says, *Unless the Lord guards the city, in vain do they keep watch who guard it;*[1] and it is he to whom Isaiah says: *Guardian, what of the night? Guardian, what of the night?*[2] The Lord would not answer, 'I am not a Samaritan,' but he said,

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[1] Ps 127:1 (V 126:1) [2] Is 21:11

'I do not have a demon.' Two charges were brought against him: he denied one, and gave assent to the other by being silent. He had come as guardian of the human race, and if he had said that he was not a Samaritan he would have been denying that he was a guardian. He was silent about what he knew was true, and he patiently rejected what he heard falsely said: *'I do not have a demon.'*

What is he confuting in these words but our pride? If it is irritated even slightly it returns insults cruder than it has received, and it threatens to do even what it cannot. You see how when the Lord is insulted he is not angry, he does not respond with offensive words. If he had wanted to respond to those who were saying such things, 'You yourselves have a demon', he would have been telling the truth. Unless they were possessed by a demon they could not have spoken such outrageous things about God. But even after he had received their insult, Truth was unwilling to speak the truth. He might have seemed not to be speaking the truth but to have been provoked into returning the offensive words. What is the significance of this for us? When we receive false and abusive words from our neighbors, must we not be silent even about their truly wicked deeds so as not to turn the duty of righteous reproof into weapons of rage?

Since anyone who makes use of the zeal of God is dishonored by wicked men, the Lord provided us with an example of patience in himself: *'But I honor my Father, and you have dishonored me.'* And he provides us with an example of what we should do in such a situation when he adds: *'I do not seek my own glory; there is one who seeks and judges.'* We know that it is written that *the Father has given all judgment to the Son,*[3] and yet we see that when the Son receives insulting words he does not seek his own glory. He leaves the offenses offered him for the Father's judgment, thus he suggests to us how patient we should be when even he, the judge, does not wish to avenge himself.

[3] Jn 5:22

But when the perversity of the wicked increases, not only should we not cease to preach but we should even intensify our efforts. The Lord counsels us to do this by his example. After he was said to have a demon, he extended the benefits of his preaching when he said: *'Truly, truly, I say to you, If anyone keeps my word, he will not see death for ever.'* But just as it is inevitable that the good become better as a result of offenses, so the condemned always become worse after receiving a kindness. After they had received his preaching they repeated: *'Now we know that you have a demon.'* They had clung to eternal death without realizing that this was the death to which they were clinging. They had in view only the death of the body, and were blind as to the meaning of the word of Truth. So they said: *'Abraham is dead and the prophets are dead, and you say, ''If anyone keeps my word, he will not taste death for ever.'' '* It's as if in venerating Abraham and the prophets they were placing them ahead even of Truth himself. We are shown that those who do not know God even venerate his servants erroneously.

We must note that the Lord sees them opposing him with an open attack, but does not cease preaching insistently to them. *'Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; he saw it and was glad.'* Abraham saw the day of the Lord when he hospitably received three angels as a prefiguration of the most holy Trinity.[4] After he had received them, he spoke to the three as to one, since although there are three persons in the Trinity, the nature of the divinity is one. But the unspiritual minds of his hearers did not raise their eyes from his body. Although he was God they took account only of his age in the flesh: *'You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?'*

Our Redeemer graciously turns their gaze away from his body and draws it to contemplation of his divinity. He says: *'Truly, truly, I say to you, Before Abraham was, I am.'* 'Before' indicates past time, 'I am' present time. Because divinity does not have past and future time, but always is, he did not say, 'I was before Abraham,' but *'Before Abraham was, I am.'* Hence it was said to Moses: *I am who I am,* and: *You will say to the children of Israel, 'He who is sent me to you.'* [5] Therefore he who could draw near by manifesting his presence, and depart after completing his life, existed both before and after Abraham. Truth always exists, because nothing begins before it in time, nor comes to an end after it.

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[4] Gn 18:1-3

Their unbelieving hearts could not take in these words about eternity, and they rushed to take up stones. They sought to destroy him whom they could not understand. We see what the Lord did against the rage of those who would stone him in the following words: *But Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.*

It is very astonishing, dearly beloved, that the Lord avoided his persecutors, by hiding himself. If he had wanted to exercise the power of his divinity, he would have bound them in a moment with a silent movement of his mind, or destroyed them with the punishment of sudden death. Because he had come to suffer, he did not will to exercise his judgment. At the time of his passion he revealed what great things he could do, and yet he endured the purpose of his coming. When he told his persecutors who were seeking him, *I am he,*[6] by his words alone he struck down their pride, and knocked them all to the ground. Why then on this occasion did he hide himself, when he could have escaped the hands of those who would have stoned him without hiding? Our Redeemer, having become a human being among humans, teaches us some things by his words and others by his example. What does he tell us by this example, except that even when it is possible for us to resist we should humbly avoid the anger of the proud? Hence Paul tells us to *yield to anger.*[7] With what humility should a human being flee from his neighbor's anger if God avoided the rage of those who were angry at him by hiding himself?

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[5] Ex 3:14 [6] Jn 18:6 [7] Rm 12:19

Let no one raise himself up against the offenses he has received, then; let no one return injury for injury. It is indeed more honorable to imitate God by fleeing silently in the face of insult than to prevail by answering back. But the proud speak against this in their hearts: It is disgraceful for you to be silent when you have received an insult. Anyone seeing you remaining silent when you've received an insult won't think you are showing patience but that you are acknowledging the accusation. But where does this word in our heart against patience come from if not from the fact that we attach our thoughts to the lowest things, and that when we seek glory on earth we do not take care to please him who beholds us from heaven. And so when we have received an insult, let us silently consider the word of God in what we are going to do: *'I do not seek my own glory; there is one who seeks and judges.'* But the words written of our Lord, *he hid himself,* can also be understood in another way. He had preached many things to the Jews, but they mocked his words. They had even become worse as a result of his preaching, since they reached the point of throwing stones. What did the Lord indicate by hiding himself except that Truth himself is hidden from those who refuse to follow his words? Truth flees from the hearts he does not find humble. How many people are there today who abhor the hard heartedness of the Jews because they were unwilling to listen to the Lord's preaching? Yet they are the same, as far as their deeds go, as those whose faith they criticize. They listen to the Lord's commandments, they acknowledge his miracles, but they refuse to be turned away from their wickedness. See how he calls us, and we are unwilling to return; see how he puts up with us, and we ignore his patience. Let us all abandon our wickedness while there is time, my friends; let us all fear God's patience, lest later on when he is angry we be unable to escape him whom we reject now when he is inclined to peace.

NOTES

1. Homily 18 in Migne (*PL* 1150). All three of the early Gospel books, W, N and Bu, assign this pericope to the latter part of Lent.
2. Again, a derivation taken from Saint Jerome's *Interpretation of Hebrew Names* (*CC* 72: 148, 4).

homily 17

These twelve Jesus sent out, and commanded them, 'Do not go aside into the way of the Gentiles and do not enter into the cities of the Samaritans. But go instead to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as you go preach, saying, The Kingdom of heaven has come near. Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You have received freely, give freely.'
(Matthew 10: 5–8)[1]*

It is clear to all, dearly beloved, that our Redeemer came into the world for the salvation of the Gentiles. When we behold Samaritans called daily to the faith, what did he mean when he sent his disciples to preach and said, *'Do not go aside into the way of the Gentiles and do not enter into the cities of the Samaritans, but go rather to the sheep of the house of Israel which have perished,'* except that he wished the preaching done first to the Jews alone, and then to all the Gentiles—a conclusion that we reach from the actual outcome of events. When the former were called but refused to be converted, the holy preachers would come in turn to the calling of the Gentiles. The preaching about our Redeemer, which had been spurned by his own people, would be extended to the Gentiles as outsiders, and what happened to the Jews by way of example would prove to be an increase of grace for the Gentiles. For there were at that time some from among the Jews who were to be called, and some from among the Gentiles who were not to be called. We read in the Acts of the Apostles that when Peter began to preach, three thousand Hebrews believed,[1] and later on, five thousand.[2] Whereas when the apostles wished to preach to the Gentiles in Asia Minor, we are told that they were forbidden by the Spirit.[3] And yet the Spirit himself, who at first forbade this preaching, later poured himself out in the hearts of the people of Asia Minor. For a long time now all of Asia Minor has believed. This is the reason that he at first forbade what he later accomplished, that there were then in Asia some who were not to be saved, some who neither merited restoration to life, nor yet a more serious judgment for having spurned their preaching. And so by a mysterious and hidden judgment the holy preaching was withheld from the ears of certain persons, because they did not merit to be aroused by grace.

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[1] Ac 2:41 [2] Ac 4:4 [3] Ac 16:6

Hence, dearly beloved, in everything we do we must fear the hidden plans of the omnipotent Lord concerning us. When our hearts are wholly centered on the affairs of this world, and do not of their own accord reflect on their condition, the one who judges interiorly may bring dreadful calamities against them. The psalmist had this in mind when he said: *Come and see the works of the Lord; how dreadful in his plans concerning the children of men.*[4] He saw that one is mercifully called, and another rejected because of the demands of justice. Since the Lord arranges some things by sparing, and others by being angry, he feared exceedingly what he was unable to grasp. The one he saw as not only inscrutable, but also inexorable in some of his judgments, he described as dreadful in his plans.

But let us hear what the preachers were commanded when they were sent forth: *'Go and preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven has come near.'* Even if the Gospel were to be silent, dearly beloved, the world now cries this. Its ruins are its words. Struck by so many blows, it has fallen from its glory. It is as if the world reveals to us now that another kingdom is near, which will succeed it. It is abhorrent now to the very people who loved it. Its very ruins preach that it should not be loved. If anyone's house were shaken, and threatened ruin, whoever lived there would flee; the one who loved it when it was standing would hasten to leave it as soon as possible when it was falling. Therefore if the world is falling, and we embrace it by loving it, we are choosing rather to be overwhelmed than to live in it. No reason separates us from its ruin, when love blinds us by our attachment to it.

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[4] Ps 66:5 (V 65:5)

It is easy now, when we see everything heading for destruction, to disengage our minds from love of the world. But then it was very difficult, because they were sent to preach the unseen kingdom of heaven at the very time when everyone far and wide could see the kingdoms of earth flourishing. And so miracles were granted to the holy preachers, that their evident power might lend credence to their words, and that those who preached[2]* something new might perform something new. It is said in this same reading: *'Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons.'*

With the world flourishing, the human race increasing, the body enduring long in this life, riches abounding, who would believe that there was another life when he heard of it, who would prefer invisible to visible things? But with the sick returning to health, the dead rising to life, lepers being cleansed, demoniacs being snatched from the power of unclean spirits—when so many visible miracles had been performed, who would not believe what he heard about invisible things? In truth visible miracles shine forth to attract the hearts of those who see them to faith in invisible things, so that from the wonder done externally what is interior and far more wonderful may be realized.

So now too, when the number[3]* of believers has grown, there are many within the holy Church who pursue the life of the virtues; but they lack the signs of the virtues, because it is useless for a miracle to be shown externally if there is nothing to be done interiorly. It was for this reason that Paul said that *signs are for unbelievers, not believers;*[5] for this reason that this outstanding preacher raised up Eutychus by his prayer in the presence of all unbelievers, when he slept during his preaching and fell from the window and died;[6] but he did not cure Timothy, his companion on his travels and his helper in holy preaching, when he was exhausted from the weakness of his stomach by a word, but restored him by his healing art, saying: *Use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent illnesses.*[7] If he revived by one prayer a weak unbeliever who was, as we believe, dead, why did he not save his sick companion by a prayer? It is undoubtedly because the former who was still inwardly not alive had to be healed outwardly by a miracle so that an inner power might bring him to life through what the exterior one made manifest, whereas the signs were not to be displayed outwardly in the case of the sick believer, who was completely alive inwardly.

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[5] 1 Co 14:22

But granting the efficacy of the preaching and the power of the miracles, let us hear what our Redeemer added: *'You have received freely, give freely.'* He foresaw that some, having received this gift of the Spirit, would turn it to business use, and would debase the miraculous signs, yielding to avarice. Thus Simon the magician, being very eager to produce miracles by the imposition of hands,[8] wished to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit for money. He could then commit a greater sin by selling what he had purchased through wickedness. Thus too our Redeemer made a scourge of cords, and drove the crowds from the temple, and overturned the seats of those who were selling doves.[9] To sell doves means to grant the imposition of hands, by which the Spirit is received, not for the merit of the recipient's life but for a price. There are indeed some who do not receive a price in money from an ordination, and yet they bestow holy orders as a human favor, and only seek the recompense of praise for it. Undoubtedly these are not granting freely what they have received freely, because they seek payment in esteem for the holy office they have conferred.[4]* Hence the prophet, when he was describing

[6] Ac 20:9–12 [7] 1 Tm 5:23 [8] Ac 8:18–19 [9] Jn 2:14–15

the righteous man rightly said that *he is one who keeps his hands clean of every gift.*[10] He did not say that he is one who keeps his hands free of a gift, but added *every,* because a gift given from deference is one thing, a gift from the hand another, and a gift from the tongue still another. A gift from deference is submission conferred without being deserved, a gift from the hand is money, a gift from the tongue esteem. Therefore whoever grants holy orders keeps his hands free from every gift when he not only demands no money, but not even human favors for the sacred gifts.

But you, dearly beloved, who are involved in secular matters, since you are familiar with our affairs, call before your mind's eye your own. Do everything for each other freely. Do not seek recompense for your work in this world, which you now see to have declined with such great rapidity, lest you do evil in any way, and do good for the sake of temporal recompense. Seek as witness of your work him whom you await as judge. Let him now see your good deeds in secret, that he may show them to all on the day when he grants you your reward. As you daily provide food for your bodies to keep them from failing, so let your good works be the daily nourishment of your hearts. The body is fed with food, the spirit sustained by good works. You should not deny to your soul, which will live for ever, what you grant to your body which is going to die. If ever a sudden fire destroys a dwelling, and its owner seizes what he values and flees, he counts as gain whatever he takes with him out of the flames. You can see that a fire of calamities is burning up the world, and the end, which is now near, is like a fire, laying waste everything in it that appeared delightful. Therefore, my friend, believe it the greatest gain if you carry off anything from it, if you take anything with you as you flee, if, by bestowing it as an everlasting recompense on yourselves, you save what could have perished had it remained. In truth we lose all our earthly possessions if we save them, but we save them by yielding them well. Time is quickly running out. Let us prepare with haste for seeing our judge soon; our good deeds are impelling us towards him with great urgency.

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[10] Is 33:15

NOTES

1. Homily 4 in Migne (*PL* 1089). There is no indication in the homily itself as to the liturgical occasion on which it might have been preached. The sole note about it in the early Gospel books is that Mt 10:7 has the annotation beside it in Bu that this Gospel passage is the one to be used for the ordination of a bishop or on the feasts of apostles.
2. The long clause comprising the central part of this sentence was used by Bede in both his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 194, 1107/1108) and his *Commentary on Mark* (CC 120: 470, 1300/1302).
3. A sentence, together with the first clause of the next sentence, used by Bede in both his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 194, 1108/13) and his *Commentary on Mark* (CC 120:470, 1302/1307).
4. A similar passage likening the Jews selling doves in the temple to bishops conferring holy orders for money or praise, or to obtain reciprocal favors, is found in Gregory's homily 19. This latter passage is quoted word for word by Bede in his *Commentary on Mark* (CC 120: 579, 1451/62). Bede also adapts Gregory's thought for use in his homily 2, 1 (CC 122: 187, 99/103). Both Gregory and Bede seem to have relied for this idea on Saint Augustine's *Commentary on John* (CC 36: 103, 1-104, 24).

homily 18

The kingdom of God is like a person travelling into a distant country who called his servants and delivered his goods to them. To one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to each man according to his ability. And immediately he left on his journey. Then the one who had received the five talents went and traded with them and made another five talents. And likewise the one who had received two also gained another two. But he who had received one went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money. After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled with them. And so the one who had received five talents came and brought another five saying, 'Lord, you gave me five talents. Look, I have gained five talents more.' His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. Because you have been faithful about a few things, I will put you in charge of many things. Enter into the joy of your master.' And he who had received two talents came and said, 'Lord, you gave me two talents. Look, I have gained two more talents besides them.' His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.' Then he who had received the one talent came and said, 'Master, I knew you are a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, gathering where you have not scattered, and being afraid I went and hid your talent in the earth. Here it is; see you have what is yours.' His lord answered and said to him, 'You wicked and lazy servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered. Therefore you ought to have given my money to the moneylenders, and on my return I would have received what was mine with interest. Take the talent away from him, and give it to the one who has ten

> *talents. For to everyone who has, more will be given and he shall have more than enough; but from everyone who has not, even what he seems to have shall be taken away from him. And throw the unprofitable servant into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'*
>
> (Matthew 25:14–30)[1]*

The reading from the holy Gospel advises us, dearly beloved, to bear in mind that we who have received something more than others in this world may be judged more severely by the world's Creator. When his gifts increase the responsibility of accounting for them also grows greater. Everyone must be more humble, then, and readier to serve, as a result of his gifts, the more he sees that he will be constrained to render an account of them.

The man who is setting out for foreign parts summons his servants, and distributes talents to them to carry on business with. After a long time he returns to demand an account of them. Those who have worked well he rewards for the increase they have brought in, but he condemns the servant who holds back from good works. Who is the man who sets out for foreign parts but our Redeemer, who departed to heaven in the body he had taken on? Earth is the proper place for his body; it is transported to foreign parts, so to speak, when he establishes it in heaven.[2]*

The man setting out for foreign parts entrusted his goods to his servants, for he granted his spiritual gifts to those who believed in him. To one he entrusted five talents, to another two, to another one. There are five bodily senses, sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch. The five talents represent the gift of the five senses, that is, knowledge of externals; the two talents signify theory and practice; the one talent signifies theory alone.

The person who received five talents gained another five. There are some who, even without knowing how to probe into inward and mystical matters, use the natural gifts they have received to teach correctly those they can reach to strive for their heavenly home. While guarding themselves from physical wantonness, from striving after earthly things, and from taking pleasure in things they can see, they restrain others too from these things by their counsel.

And there are some endowed with two talents, so to speak, who comprehend both theory and practice. They understand the fine points of interior matters and accomplish astonishing things outwardly. When they preach to others by both theory and practice, their business venture, so to call it, yields a twofold gain. It is good that another five and another two are said to have been gained, since when preaching is provided for both sexes the talents received are so to speak doubled.

But the person who received one talent went away, dug in the earth, and hid his master's money. Hiding a talent in the earth means employing one's abilities in earthly affairs, failing to seek spiritual profit, never raising one's heart from earthly thoughts. There are some who have received the gift of understanding but have a taste only for things that pertain to the body. The prophet says of them: *They are wise in doing evil, but they do not know how to do good.*[1]

The Lord who dispensed the talents returns to demand an account, because he who now generously bestows spiritual gifts may at the judgment inquire searchingly into what was achieved; he may take into account what everyone has received, and weigh up the gain we bring back from his gifts.

The servant who returned with two talents was praised by his master. He was led to his eternal reward when his master said to him: *Well done, good and faithful servant. Because you have been faithful about a few things, I shall put you in charge of many. Enter into the joy of your master.* All the good deeds of our present life, however many they may appear to be, are few in comparison with our eternal recompense.

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1. Jr 4:22

The faithful servant is put in charge of many things after overcoming all the troubles brought him by perishable things. He glories in the eternal joys of his heavenly dwelling. He is brought completely into the joy of his master when he is taken into his eternal home and joined to the company of angels. His inner joy at his gift is such that there is no longer any external perishable thing that can cause him sorrow.

But the servant who was unwilling to work with his talent returned to his master with words of excuse: *Master, I knew that you are a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, gathering where you have not scattered; being afraid, I went away and hid your talent in the earth. Here it is; see you have what is yours.* The useless servant called his master hard, and yet he neglected to serve him for profit. He said that he was afraid to put out the talent for interest, when he should have been afraid only of bringing it back to his master without interest. For many people in the Church resemble that servant. They are afraid to attempt a better way of life, but not of resting in idleness. When they advert to the fact that they are sinners, the prospect of laying hold of ways of holiness alarms them, but they feel no fear at remaining in their wickedness.

Peter is a good example. When he was still weak, he saw the miracle of the fishes and said: *Depart from me, O Lord, because I am a sinful man.*[2] If you regard yourself as a sinner, it is only right that you not drive God away from you! But those who see that they are weak, and are for this reason unwilling to improve their habits or way of life, are like people admitting that they are sinners, and at the same time banishing God. They flee him whom they ought to hallow in themselves; even in the agony of death they do not know where to turn and cling to life.

The servant is answered: *You wicked and lazy servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have*

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[2] Lk 5:8

not scattered. Therefore you ought to have given my money to the moneylenders, and on my return I would have received what was mine with interest. The servant is trapped by his own words when his master says, *I reap where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered*: 'If according to your own way of thinking I expect what I have not given, how much more will I expect from you what I gave you to trade with?' To give money to moneylenders means to lay out knowledge of preaching to those who can practice it. As you perceive my danger, if I hold the Lord's money, so carefully consider your own, dearly beloved. What you hear will be required of you with interest. The point about interest is that more comes back than was laid out. When you have paid back what you have received, you must add to it something you have not received.

Consider then, dearly beloved, that you will pay interest on this money you have received, on these words. Take care to be eager to understand from what you hear also other things you do not hear. Make connections between one thing and another, and so learn for yourselves how to do other things than those you have already learned from the preacher's words.

But let us listen to the penalty his master imposes on the lazy servant: *Take the talent from him, and give it to the one who has ten talents.* It would seem more appropriate to take the one talent from the wicked servant and give it to the one who received two talents rather than to the one who received five. It should have been given to the one who had less rather than to the one who had more. But, as I said above, the five talents represent the five senses, that is, knowledge of externals; and the two talents signify theory and practice. Therefore the one who received two had more than the one who had received five, because the one who was found worthy of the direction of externals through his five talents still lacked the knowledge of inner things. And so the one talent, which, as I said, signifies theory, was bound to be given to the one who attended so well to the externals he had received. We see this daily in the Church. Many attend very well to externals as they receive them, and are brought by additional grace to mystical understanding as well. Thus those who faithfully attend to externals may also be strong in their inner understanding.

And immediately a general thought is added: *For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have more than enough; but from everyone who has not, even what he seems to have will be taken away from him.* To the one who has, more will be given, and he will have more than enough. Whoever has love receives other gifts as well. Whoever does not have love loses even the gifts he appeared to have received. Hence it is necessary, my friends, that in everything you do, you be vigilant about guarding love. True love is to love your friend in God, and your enemy for the sake of God. Whoever does not have this loses every good that he has; he is deprived of the talent he received, and according to the Lord's sentence he is cast into external darkness. External darkness comes as a punishment to one who has fallen voluntarily into internal darkness through his own sin. The one who freely enjoyed pleasurable darkness in this world will be constrained to suffer punishing darkness in the next.

We must be certain that no slothful person is safe from the consequences of receiving a talent. No one can truly say, 'I have not received a talent, and there is no reason I should be compelled to give an account.' Even the very little that any poor person has received will be counted as his talent. One person has received understanding, and owes the office of preaching to his talent. Another has received earthly possessions and is under obligation to distribute alms from his properties. Another has received neither understanding of inner things nor many possessions, but has learned a skill which sustains him; in his case his skill is counted as a talent. Another has acquired none of these things, but perhaps he has merited acquaintance with a rich person and has received the talent of acquaintance: if he tells him nothing on behalf of the poor, he is condemned for keeping back his talent. Therefore the one with understanding must take care not to remain silent, the one with an abundance of possessions must watch that he is not slow in showing mercy, the one with a skill must be especially zealous to share his craft and usefulness with his neighbor, the one with an opportunity to speak with a rich person should fear to be condemned for keeping back his talent if he does not intercede with him on behalf of the poor when he can.

In truth the Judge who is to come will exact from each of us as much as he gave. So that everyone may be free from anxiety about the account he must give for his talent when the Lord returns, let him consider daily, with trembling, what he has received. The time is now near when the one who set out for foreign parts will return. He who departed far from this earth where he was born went away, so to speak, into foreign parts; but he will truly return to demand an accounting for his talents. If we are listless in performing good deeds he will judge us more severely concerning those gifts he has bestowed on us.

Let us then bear in mind the things we have received, and be careful in trading with them. Let no earthly care deter us from our spiritual work, lest we provoke the talent's master to anger by hiding our talent in the earth. As the judge is now weighing his sins, the lazy servant digs up his talent from the earth, since there are many who withdraw themselves from their earthly desires and works when they are dragged to eternal punishment by the chastisement of the judge. Let us be watchful, then, before we must render an account of our talent, so that when the Judge is already approaching to strike us, the profit we have made may plead for us. May he who lives and reigns with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever, grant us this. Amen.

NOTES

1. Homily 9 in Migne (*PL* 1106). The Gospel passage is assigned by W to the feast of Pope Saint Marcellus I, martyr, which was celebrated on January 16; and by N and Bu to the feast of Saint Januarius, martyr, which was celebrated on September 19. There is no evidence in the homily itself as for what feast day it might have been used.
2. A sentence taken over by Bede for use in his *Commentary on Mark* (CC 120: 604, 348/50).

homily 19

And after these things the Lord appointed another seventy as well and sent them ahead of him two by two into every city and place where he himself was to come. Therefore he said to them: 'The harvest truly is great but the laborers are few; so ask the Lord of the harvest therefore to send laborers to his harvest. Go your ways. See, I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; do not greet anyone on the road. Into whatever house you enter say first: Peace be to this house. And if the son of peace is there, your peace shall rest on it; if not, it will return to you. But stay in the same house, eating and drinking what is there; for the laborer deserves his wages. Do not go from house to house.'

(Luke 10:1–7)[1]*

Our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, dearly beloved, sometimes connects us by his words and sometimes by his actions. His very deeds are commands, because when he does something silently, he is making known to us what we ought to do. He sent his disciples to preach two by two because there are two commandments of love,[2]* of God and neighbor, and there can be no love between fewer than two. Strictly speaking no one is said to have love for himself; love becomes possible when one reaches out toward someone else. The Lord sent his disciples to preach two by two, to inform us silently that no one who has no love for another person should undertake the duty of preaching.

He sent them ahead of him to every city and place where he himself was to come. The Lord follows his preachers. Preaching comes first, and then the Lord comes to the dwelling places of our hearts; words of exhortation precede, and by means of them Truth is received by hearts. This is why

Isaiah addresses preachers: *Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight the pathways of our God!*[1] And the psalmist says: *Make a way for him who rises in the West.*[2] The Lord rose in the West because it was from the place that he sank down in his passion that he manifested his glory by rising.[3]* He rose in the West, because by rising he trampled underfoot the death he bore. We make a way for him who rises in the West, then, when we preach his glory to your hearts, so that he himself, coming afterwards, may enlighten them by the presence of his love.

Let us listen to what he says after he sent out his preachers: *'The harvest indeed is great, but the laborers are few; so ask the Lord of the harvest to send laborers to his harvest.'* The harvest is now great, but the laborers are few, because—I cannot speak of this without sorrow—although there are many to hear good things, there is no one to tell them. The world is full of priests, but seldom do we find a laborer in God's harvest. We do indeed receive the priestly office, but we do not carry out its work.

But, my friends, consider what he says: *'Ask the Lord of the harvest to send laborers to his harvest.'* Beg on our behalf that we may be able to work worthily for you, lest our tongues cease to exhort you, lest after we have received the duty of preaching our silence may hand us over to the righteous judge. Often the tongues of those who preach are bound because of their own wickedness; often this comes about as a result of the sin of those subject to them. Then those who preside find that the word of preaching has been withdrawn from them. In fact the tongue of the preacher is bound because of his own wickedness, as the psalmist says: *But God said to the sinner, 'Why do you tell of my righteous doings?'*[3] And again the voices of preachers are checked because of the wickedness of those subject to them, as the Lord told Ezechiel, *I shall make your tongue cleave to the roof of your mouth, and you shall be dumb and not like a man who*

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[1] Is 40: 3 [2] Ps 68:4 (V 67:5) [3] Ps 50:16 (V 49:16)

reprimands, because they are a provoking house.[4] He means: 'The word of preaching is taken away from you. As the people provoke me by their deeds, they are not worthy to have the encouragement of the truth. We cannot easily recognize whose vice causes the word to be withdrawn from the preacher. We know indeed that the shepherd's silence is sometimes harmful to him, but that it is always harmful to those subject to him.

But even if we are not sufficiently virtuous to preach, would that we might hold our official position with innocence of life. *'See, I am sending you like lambs among wolves.'* Many, when they receive a position of ruling, are on fire to tear their subjects to pieces. They demonstrate the terror of authority, and harm those they ought to assist. Because they have no love in their hearts, they are eager to appear to be masters, and fail to recall that they are fathers. They change from a position of humility to one of pride and dominance; if they flatter outwardly on occasion, inwardly they rage. Truth says of them elsewhere: *They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.*[5]

Against all this we must consider that we are sent like lambs among wolves, so that we may preserve our awareness of innocence, and not have the sting of malice. A person who undertakes the office of preaching should not cause evils but rather suffer them. By his gentleness he may allay the anger of the violent, and being himself wounded by ill-treatment from others, he may heal the wounds of sinners. If his zeal for rectitude ever demands that he show anger against those subject to him, let his passion be the result of love and not of cruelty, then he may show proper regard for discipline externally, and love inwardly, with a father's devotion, toward those whom he reproves outwardly as if he were attacking them.

A leader shows this when he seeks nothing of the world, when he does not bend his neck under the burden of earthly desires. Hence the Lord says: '*Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; do not greet anyone on the road.*' A preacher should have such reliance on God[4]* that, even if he makes no provision for the needs of the present life, he may be certain that he will lack nothing. Otherwise, while his mind is engaged in temporal affairs, he may make less provision for the eternal good of others. Also he is not allowed to greet any one on the road. This shows the great haste with which he ought to set out on the journey of his preaching.

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[4] Ezk 3:26 [5] Mt 7:15

But if anyone wants to take these words allegorically, money is kept shut up in the wallet, and money kept shut up is hidden wisdom. A person who has a word of wisdom, but neglects to spend it for his neighbor, is like one who keeps his money bound up in his wallet.[5]* Hence it is written: *What advantage is there in concealed wisdom or in concealed treasure?*[6]

What does the bag represent but the burdens of the world? And what do the sandals represent here but examples of dead works? It is not right that a person who undertakes the duty of preaching should carry the burden of worldly business. When this presses down on his neck, he may not rise up to preach the things of heaven. Nor should he look to examples of foolish works lest he believe that he is protecting his own by dead skins, so to speak. There are indeed many who defend their own wickedness by the wickedness of others; when they consider that others have done such things, they think that they are allowed to do them too. What else are they doing but trying to protect their feet with the skins of dead animals? Everyone who greets someone on the way does so because he has happened to meet him on the way, and not out of zeal for his salvation. One who preaches salvation to his hearers not from love of his eternal home but from desire for a reward is like someone greeting others on the way. He desires their salvation, not willingly, but because he happened to meet them.

6. Si 41:14 (V 17)

'Into whatever house you enter, say first: "Peace be to this house." And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest on it; if not, it will return to you.' The peace offered by the preacher rests on the house if there is a son of peace in it, or it returns to the preacher. Either there will be someone predestined to life who attends to the heavenly word he hears, or, if there is no one who wants to listen, the preacher himself will not be without reward because his peace returns to him. The Lord will pay his wages for the labor of his work.

But look how the one who forbade the preacher to carry a bag and wallet allows him to provide his needs and nourishment from his preaching: *'But stay in the same house, eating and drinking what is there; for the laborer deserves his wages.'* If our peace is accepted, it is right that we should stay in the same house, eating and drinking what is there, to obtain earthly pay from those to whom we offer the recompense of a heavenly home. Paul also received these things, as something very small, and said: *If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it a great thing if we harvest your material things?*[7] And we must note that *the workman deserves his wages.* If our peace is accepted, it is right that we should stay in the same house, eating and drinking what is there, to obtain earthly pay from those to whom we offer the recompense of a heavenly home. Paul also received these things, as something very small, and said: *If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it a great thing if we harvest your material things?*[8] And we must note that *the workman deserves his wages.* Nourishment is part of the wages for work done. The wages for the labor of preaching begin in this life, and are completed in heaven in the vision of truth. We are to reflect that we are owed two wages for one work, one coming to us on the road, the other in our homes. One sustains us in our labor, the other rewards us at our resurrection.

Accordingly the wages we receive in our present life ought to accomplish this in us, that we reach out more strongly for those that follow. No true preacher should preach to receive his wages at this present time; he receives them so that he can continue to preach. Anyone who preaches merely to receive his wages here, either praise or a gift, surely deprives himself of his eternal wages. But anyone who desires that what he says please people, so that his words may cause the Lord and not himself to be loved, or who obtains earthly payment for his preaching to prevent his being exhausted by poverty as a result of it, surely nothing stands in the way of his receiving his wages in his home, even though he took something for his needs on the road.

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[7] 1 Co 9:11 [8] 1 Co 9:11

But what are we—I cannot say this without sorrow—what are we shepherds doing, who both receive our wages and are not laborers? We receive the fruits of holy Church in daily pay, but we exert ourselves very little in preaching on behalf of the eternal Church. Let us reflect on who will be condemned for taking a laborer's wage without labor here. We live from the offerings of the faithful, but do we exert ourselves on behalf of the souls of the faithful? We take what the faithful offer for release from their sins as our pay, yet we do not strive against these sins by our own zeal either for prayer or for preaching, as it is right for us to do. We rebuke scarcely anyone openly for his sin. And what is more serious, if there is someone powerful in this world, we may even praise his faults so that he won't angrily withdraw the gift he was offering as a result of our opposition.

We must constantly recall what is written about certain persons in Hosea: *They devour the sins of my people.*[9] Why does he say that they devour the sins of his people except that they encourage the sins of transgressors lest they lose their temporal pay? But we too, we who live off the offerings the faithful make for their sins, if we devour them and are silent, we are surely partaking of their sins. Let us then consider who is guilty in God's sight, partaking of the ransom-money made for sins, and doing nothing against them by preaching. Let us listen to the words of blessed Job: *If my land cries out against me and its furrows run with tears, if without payment I have devoured its fruit.*[10] The land cries out against its owner when the Church rightly murmurs against its shepherd. Its furrows run with tears if the hearts of all who listen, which were ploughed by the preaching voice and the energetic denunciations of our fathers, see something to deplore in the life of their shepherd. The good owner of this land does not partake of its fruit without payment, because a conscientious shepherd pays out the talent of the word first so that he may not take pay for his sustenance from the Church to his own condemnation. We then devour the fruits of our land with payment when we exert ourselves in preaching and take pay from the Church. We are heralds of the Judge who is going to come. Who will proclaim the Judge to come if the herald is silent?

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[9] Ho 4:8

We must ponder the fact that everyone, as much as he can, as much as he is in a position to, should strive zealously to make known to the Church he has undertaken to serve both the dreadfulness of the coming judgment and the sweetness of the kingdom. One who is not in a position to offer encouragement to everyone at the same time should instruct individuals, as much as he can, he should offer instruction in personal talks, he should seek for profit in the hearts of his children through simple encouragement. We must consider what was said to the apostles, and by the apostles to us: *You are the salt of the earth.*[11] If we are salt, we should season the hearts of believers. You who are shepherds, consider that you are pasturing God's living beings. Of them the psalmist said: *Your living beings shall dwell in it.*[12] We often see a block of salt put out for brute animals; they are to lick it and be made better. A priest among his people should be like a block of salt in the midst of brute animals. A priest must be careful about what he says to individuals, to counsel each one in such a way that anyone associated with the priest may be seasoned with the taste of eternal life as if by contact with salt. We are not the salt of the earth if we do not season the hearts of those who hear us. One who does not withhold his preaching gives this seasoning to his neighbor. But then we truly preach what is right to others, if our words are revealed in our actions, if we ourselves are pierced by divine love, and if we wash away with our tears the stains of human life which we daily acquire, since we cannot live without sin. Then do we truly feel remorse if we diligently ponder the deeds of our ancestors so that when we have regarded their renown, our own lives may appear mean in our eyes. Then do we truly feel remorse, when we diligently examine God's commandments, and strive to advance by the means we know those whom we reverence used for their own advancement.

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[10] Jb 31:38-39 [11] Mt 5:13 [12] Ps 68:10 (V 67:11)

This is why it is written about Moses: *He also put there a bronze basin, in which Aaron and his son washed themselves when they entered the Holy of Holies; he made it from the mirrors of the women who kept watch at the door of the tabernacle.*[13] Moses put there a bronze basin in which the priests had to wash themselves and enter the Holy of Holies, because God's law prescribes that we first wash ourselves by compunction, that in our uncleanness we may not be unworthy to enter the cleanness of the secrets of God. What he tells us about this basin is most apt. It was made of the mirrors of the women who kept watch continually at the door of the tabernacle. The women's mirrors are the commandments of God in which holy souls see themselves always. If they detect any stains or ugliness in them they correct the wickedness in their thoughts, and make their faces beautiful again, so that they shine back, as it were, from the image in the glass. When they carefully examine the Lord's precepts they recognize in them as if from a reflected likeness the things in themselves that either please or displease the divine man.

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13. Ex 30: 18–20; 38:8

While they remain in this life they cannot enter the eternal tabernacle. Still, women keep watch at the door of the tabernacle, because while physical weakness still weighs down their holy souls, they keep a watch on the entrance to heaven with constant love. Moses made the basin for the priests from the mirrors of the women, then, because God's law shows how the bath of compunction cleanses us from the stains of our sins by providing us with heavenly commandments to look into, which have made holy souls pleasing to their heavenly spouse. If we turn toward them with attention, we see the stains deep within us; when we see the stains we are pierced with the sorrow of repentance; pierced by this sorrow, we wash ourselves, so to speak, in the basin made from the women's mirrors.[6*]

But when we feel inner compunction we must also become zealous for the lives of those entrusted to our care. The bitterness of compunction should not affect us so as to turn us away from concern for our neighbors. What good does it so to love ourselves and abandon our neighbors? Or to love our neighbors, and be zealous for them, but to abandon ourselves? Scarlet cloth, twice dyed, was to be offered to adorn the tabernacle[14] so that our love of God and neighbor might have the color of love in God's sight. That person truly loves himself who loves his creator completely. Scarlet cloth is twice dyed when a soul is set on fire toward itself and its neighbor as a result of its love of truth.[7*]

But we must be aware that our zeal for rectitude is to be exercised against our neighbor's evil deeds so that the virtue of gentleness is not lost in our zeal for strictness. A priest's anger must not be impetuous and rash, but tempered rather by a considered prudence. We must then support those we correct, and correct those we support. If one element is missing his actions will lack either zeal or gentleness.

14. Ex 25:3–4

When the temple was built, lions and oxen and cherubim were carved on its foundations.[15] Cherubim indicate fullness of knowledge; but what does it mean that neither lions alone nor oxen alone were carved there? What do the foundations of the temple represent but priests in the Church? When they sustain the cares of government, they are like foundations supporting the burden placed on them. Cherubim were portrayed on the foundations since it is surely fitting that priests have hearts filled with knowledge; the lions represented the fear of severity, and the oxen the long suffering of gentleness. Accordingly neither lions nor oxen were carved on the foundations alone, since the priest must always keep in his heart the virtue of gentleness and the fear of severity. Gentleness then seasons anger, and zealous severity enflames gentleness so that it does not become impotent.

But why do I speak of these things when I see that there are still quite a number who are guilty of worse actions? I speak to you priests in sorrow, because I know that some of you perform ordinations for a price, sell the gifts of the Spirit, and pile up wealth as well as damnation because of the wickedness of others. Why don't you remember the Lord's words: *You have received freely, give freely.*[16] Why do you not call before your inner eyes that our Redeemer entered the temple, that he overturned the seats of those selling doves, and scattered the coins of the money changers?[17] Who are they selling doves today in God's temple[8*] if not those in the Church who receive a price for the imposition of hands, that imposition by which the Holy Spirit is given from heaven? A dove is sold, because the imposition of hands through which the Holy Spirit is received is provided at a price. Our Redeemer overturned the seats of those selling doves because he destroyed the priesthood of profiteers of this kind. Hence the holy canons condemn the heresy of simony, and order that those who seek pay for

15. 1 K 7:27–29 16. Mt 10:8 17. Jn 2:14–15

the bestowal of orders be deprived of their priesthood. They overturn the seats of those selling doves when they deprive those selling the gifts of the Spirit of their priesthood, either in men's eyes or in God's.

There are many other evils in persons in high position, hidden now from the eyes of men. Shepherds frequently show themselves holy before men, and are not ashamed to have their hidden deeds appear base in the eyes of the one who looks within. The day will come, and it is not far off, when the Shepherd of shepherds will reveal himself and bring everyone's deeds to light. He who demands a reckoning from those in high places for the sins of their subjects now, will rage then, and himself condemn their wickedness. Hence the Lord himself entered the temple and made a sort of whip from cords. He drove the wicked merchants out of God's house, and overturned the seats of those selling doves, because through their shepherds he punishes the sins of their subjects, but he will strike down the vices of the shepherds in person. We can now deny before men what we are doing. He will come as judge from whose sight silence will not hide us, and whom denial cannot deceive.

Something else, dearly beloved, in the lives of shepherds causes me great suffering. Someone may think I am speaking unjustly, and so I accuse myself equally; although I am compelled by the necessities of a barbaric age, and am most unwilling to be involved in these affairs. We have strayed into business of the world; we undertake one thing as an honor, and offer ourselves for another under the pretext of a need to take action. We abandon the ministry of preaching, and, as I see it, we are called bishops as a punishment, we who have the name's prestige and not its virtue. Those entrusted to us abandon God, and we are silent; they are involved in wicked deeds, and we do not reprove them; they perish daily through their negligence and we heedlessly observe them descending to the lower world. But when can we, who neglect our own lives, correct the lives of others? We are involved with secular cares, and we seem attentive more to external affairs, the more unresponsive we become inwardly. The mind becomes insensitive to heavenly desire through its preoccupation with earthly cares. When its preoccupation with the actions of the world hardens it, it cannot be softened for the things that pertain to God's love.

The Church says of its weak members[9*]: *They have put me as a guard in the vineyards; my own vineyard I have not guarded.*[18] Our vineyards are our deeds, and we cultivate them by our daily labor. We are put as guards in the vineyards, but we do not cultivate our own. When we are involved with external affairs, we neglect to watch over our own activities. I think that God suffers greater outrage from no one, dearly beloved, than from priests. Those he has placed to reprove others he sees giving an example of wickedness in their own lives. We who ought to have restrained sin, ourselves commit it. More seriously, priests who ought to give of their own possessions frequently plunder the goods of others. If they see others living humbly and chastely, they often make fun of them. Consider what will become of the flocks, when wolves become shepherds! They undertake to guard the flock, and are not afraid to waylay the Lord's flock.

We do not seek to gain souls; we devote ourselves daily to our own pursuits, we attend to earthly matters, we strive for human praise with all our will. From being set over others we have greater freedom to do anything we like, and so we turn the ministry we have received into an occasion for display. We abandon God's cause, and we devote ourselves to earthly business; we accept a place of holiness, and involve ourselves in earthly deeds. What is written in Hosea is truly fulfilled in us: *And so it will be, like people, like priest.*[19] A priest does not differ from the people when he does not surpass their deeds by any merit of his own.

18. Sg 1:6   19. Ho 4:9

Let us invoke the tears of Jeremiah. Let him look at our death and say with tears: *How the gold has become tarnished, its color been changed; the precious stones of the sanctuary lie scattered at the head of every street.*[20] The gold has tarnished because the life of priests once made illustrious by the glory of its virtues, is now shown to be depraved because of its base actions. Its color has been changed, because that holy state has come into disgrace and contempt through worldly and despicable deeds.

The precious stones of the sanctuary were kept inside it; the high priest wore them on his breast only when he entered the Holy of Holies and appeared secretly before his Creator.[21] We, dearly beloved, we are the precious stones of the sanctuary which ought to have appeared secretly before God. We never need to be seen on the outside, that is, our outward actions never need to be seen. But the precious stones of the sanctuary lie scattered at the head of every street. Those who ought always to have remained within, by their life and prayer, have been dispersed outside by their reprehensible life. There is almost no worldly deed which priests have not carried out. When those who have been established in a holy state are concerned only with what is external, it is as if the precious stones of the sanctuary lie outside. In Greek "street" is so called because it is a wide place.[10*] The precious stones of the sanctuary are in the street when all those who are devoted to religion follow the wide ways of the world. They have been scattered not just in the street but at its head, because they accomplish the works of this world by their desires, and yet they seek the pinnacle of honor by their religious state. They lie scattered at the head of the street because they lie there by the works they perform, and desire to be praised for their appearance of holiness.

You see the great wars ravaging the world, the great blows daily destroying the people. Whose sin but ours is causing this? Cities have been laid waste, fortified places overthrown, churches and monasteries destroyed, fields reduced to wasteland. We have caused the death of a ruined people, when we ought to have led them to life. As a result of our sin, multitudes have been brought to destruction, since we neglected to teach them how to live.

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[20] Lm 4:1 [21] Ex 28: 15-29

For what shall we call human souls but the Lord's food? They were created to be transmuted into his body, to enlarge the eternal Church. We were to be the seasoning for this food, as I said earlier in connection with the sending out of preachers: *You are the salt of the earth.*[22] If the people are God's food, the priests are to be its seasoning. Because we ceased to practice prayer and holy instruction the salt has lost its taste. It cannot season God's food, and so is not acceptable to our Creator. Because of our uselessness, it has no power to season.

Let us consider whether anyone has ever been converted by our words, if anyone has done penance for his evil work after being reproved by us, if anyone has abandoned his dissipated life because of our instruction, if anyone has turned away from avarice or pride? Let us consider what interest we, who received a talent from God, and were sent to trade with it, have brought him. Indeed he told us, *Trade until I come.*[23] He is now coming, and he is seeking increase from our trading. What sort of increase of souls have we shown him as a result of our trading? How many armfuls of souls will we bring before him from the harvest of our preaching?

Let us imagine that day of accounting when the Judge will come and demand a reckoning from the servants to whom he entrusted his talents. We will see him in dreadful majesty, among choirs of angels and archangels. In that great examination the multitude of all the elect and the condemned will be led forth, and it will be revealed what each one has done. Peter will appear with a converted Judea,

[22] Mt 5:13 [23] Lk 19:13

which he drew after him; Paul will appear leading a converted world, so to say; Andrew will lead a converted Achaia with him into the sight of its king, John Asia Minor, and Thomas a converted India. There will appear all the rams of Lord's flock, with the souls they have gained; by their holy preaching they drew after them a flock subject to God. When so many shepherds with their flocks come before the eternal shepherd, what will we say, we unfortunate ones who return to our master empty-handed after our trading? We were called shepherds, but have no sheep to show as a result of our care. Now we are called shepherds; but we have not flock to lead on the day of judgment.

But if we are negligent, does almighty God desert his sheep? No; he himself will pasture them, as he promised through the prophet.[24] He will instruct all whom he has foreordained to life[25] by afflicting them in a spirit of compunction. And indeed it is through us that the faithful come to baptism; they are blessed by our prayers; they receive the Holy Spirit from God through the imposition of our hands. They come to the heavenly kingdom, and see how our negligence draws us toward perdition. The elect enter their heavenly home, purified by the work of the priests; the priests themselves hasten to the torment of hell by their wicked lives.

To what shall I liken bad priests if not to the water of baptism? It washes away the sins of the baptized and sends them to the heavenly kingdom, and itself flows off into the drain. Let us fear these things, my friends; let our apostolate really correspond to our outward actions. Let us reflect daily on the forgiveness of our sins, lest our life, through which almighty God daily frees others, remain bound by sin. Let us constantly consider what we are, let us ponder our occupation, let us ponder the burden we have taken on. Let us have daily with ourselves the reckoning we are to have with our Judge.

[24] Ezk 34: 12-16 [25] Ac 13:48

We must so have care for ourselves that we do not neglect to care for our neighbor; then everyone associated with us will be seasoned with the salt of our words. When we see anyone idle and unsteady, we must advise him to strive to restrain his wickedness through marriage. This way he can learn by what is allowed to overcome what is not. When we see someone married we must advise him to carry out his work in the world without disregarding the love of God. He must please his partner in marriage without displeasing his Creator. When we see a cleric, we must advise him to live in such a way as to provide an example to people in the world. If anything in him is justly censured, his fault may cause the very worth of religion to be questioned. When we see a monk, we must advise him that his actions, his speech, and his thoughts must always earn respect for his way of life. He must leave completely behind the things of the world, and what his habit professes to human eyes, his conduct must manifest in the eyes of God.

A holy person is to be counseled to increase in holiness, and one still unholy to correct his ways, so that anyone who associates with a priest may go away seasoned by the salt of his conversation. Reflect carefully about these things, dearly beloved, and pass them on to your neighbors. Prepare to tender to almighty God the proceeds of the trading you have undertaken. But I will more easily carry my point with you by praying and speaking.

NOTES

1. Homily 17 in Migne (*PL* 1139). There is no indication in the early Gospel books as to when this pericope was to be used, except that Bu notes that it may be used for any Sunday or weekday mass. Since the latter part of the homily is addressed to Gregory's fellow bishops, we may presume that he delivered it on the occasion of a meeting of bishops for a synod in Rome, or on some similar occurrence.
2. The latter part of this sentence together with the four following sentences was adopted by Bede for his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 214, 1898/1909).

3. Another sentence used by Bede in both his *Commentary on Luke* (*CC* 120: 112, 481/83) and his *Commentary on Mark* (*CC* 120: 449, 483/85). The idea being propounded here is that the West, normally considered a place of darkness and death, is where the Lord rose and by doing so overcame death.
4. Five long paragraphs to be found in Bede's *Commentary on Luke* (*CC* 120: 215, 1922 - 216, 1968). The first sentence of this paragraph was also used by Bede in his *Commentary on Mark* (CC 120: 504, 604/608).
5. Two sentences taken over by Bede for his *Commentary on Mark* (*CC* 120: 505, 659/62).
6. This notion of cleansing the mirror of our souls of the stains which are on it as a result of sin, so that we may recover the divine likeness to God in which we were originally created, was picked up by Saint Bernard in the early middle ages. For the resemblances between the thought of Gregory and Bernard see C. Butler, *Western Mysticism* (London: Constable & Co., 1922), 95-101, 142-45. There is a detailed account of Bernard's teaching on this subject in E. Gilson, *The Mystical Theology of Saint Bernard* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1940), 19, 45-59, 70-74, 92-99. The general theory of man's reconstitution in the image or likeness of God in which he was created, and which he lost through Adam's sin, goes back to the eastern theology of the early Christian centuries. There is an excellent summary of this in G. B. Ladner, *The Idea of Reform* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1959), 4, 74-107.
7. The same thought is to be found in Gregory's *Commentary on Ezechiel* (CC 142: 259, 75-84).
8. Five sentences taken over by Bede for use in his *Commentary on Mark* (CC 120: 579, 1451/62).
9. Four sentences used by Bede in the final book of his *Commentary on the Song of Songs,* which is made up entirely of quotations from the writings of Gregory on passages of this book of scripture.
10. *Platea* (sc. *hodos*), from the Greek *platus;* in Gregory's Latin, *platea latitudo vocatur.*

homily 20

Let your loins be girded and your lamps be burning. And be like men awaiting their master when he returns from the wedding feast, so that when he comes and knocks they may open the door to him at once. Happy are those servants whom the master finds watching when he comes. Truly I say to you, he will gird himself and make them recline at the table and will come and serve them. He may come in the second watch he may come in the third watch; happy are those servants if he finds them ready. But know this, that if the householder had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would certainly have watched and would not have allowed his home to be broken into. And, you, too, be ready, because the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

(Luke 12: 35–40)[1]*

The reading from the holy Gospel which has been read to you, dearly beloved, is clear. But in case its lucidity seems somehow too profound, I will go through it briefly so that the unknowing may understand the explanation without those who do know being burdened.

The Lord attests that excess for men lies in their loins, and for women in the navel, when he says to Job of the devil: *His power is in his loins, and his strength is in the center of his belly.*[1] Excess is given the name 'loins' for the principal sex when the Lord says: *Let your loins be girded.* We gird our loins when we curb[2]* all physical excess through self-restraint. But since it is a small thing not to commit evils if one is not also eager to labor at good works, he immediately added: *And let your lamps be burning.* We hold in our hands burning lamps when we show an example of light

[1] Jb 40:16 (11)

to our neighbors by our good works. The Lord says of them: *Let your light shine before men;* and again: *Let them see your good works, and glorify your father who is in heaven.*[2]

We are commanded to do two things: to bind our loins, and to hold lamps. Thus our bodies will be clean and pure, our works shining and true. Neither one alone can please our Redeemer. The one who does good works must cease to be defiled by excess, and the one outstanding for his purity must perform good works. Purity is of no value without good works, nor do good works avail us without purity.

But even when both are present, it remains that everyone tending in hope to his heavenly home should not curb his vices for the sake of his reputation in this world. If someone once begins a good work for the sake of his reputation, he should not persevere in his intention and seek this world's renown through his good works; he should put entire hope in the coming of his Redeemer. And so he adds immediately: *'And be like men awaiting their master when he returns from the wedding feast.'* The Lord left the wedding feast since he rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, and as a new man joined to himself the host of angels on high. He will return when he manifests himself to us at the judgment.

Then he adds about the waiting servants: *'So that when he comes and knocks they may open to him the door at once.'* He comes by hastening to the judgment, and he knocks by indicating that death is already near by troublesome sickness. We open the door to him at once if we receive him with love. No one who fears departing his body and dreads to see as judge one he recalls despising, wants to open to the judge when he knocks. But the one without anxiety concerning his hope and his works opens the door to him at once when he knocks. He welcomes his judge with joy; when he recognizes that his death is near he grows cheerful from the glory of his recompense.

2. Mt 5:16

And so he adds: *'Happy are those servants whom the master finds watching when he comes.'* That person watches who keeps[3]* his mind's eyes open to the appearance of the true light; he watches who pays heed to his beliefs in his works; he watches who drives from himself the darkness of inactivity and carelessness. This was why Paul said: *Be watchful, you righteous, and do not sin;*[3] and again: *It is now the hour for us to rise from sleep.*[4]

Let us listen to what the master does for servants when he comes: *'Truly, I say to you, he will gird himself and make them recline at table, and he will come and serve them.'* He will gird himself, make himself ready to repay them; he will make them recline at table, refresh them with eternal peace. For us to recline at table is to be at peace in the kingdom. And so the Lord said: *They will come and take their places with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.*[5] The Lord will come and serve, because he satisfies us by the manifestation of his light. His coming means his return from the judgment to his kingdom. The Lord comes to us after the judgment, because he lifts us up from his human appearance in the contemplation of his divinity; his coming means that he leads us to the vision of his glory. We see in his divinity after the judgment the one we beheld in his humanity at the judgment. At the judgment he comes in the form of a servant and appears to everyone, since it is written: *They will look on him whom they pierced.*[6] When the condemned fall down to their punishment, the righteous are led to the brightness of his glory, as is written: *The wicked is taken away, so that he will see the glory of the Lord.*[7]

But what if his servants are neglectful during the first watch? The first watch is the guard we keep during our childhood; but we are not to lose hope and cease from daily good, for the Lord tells us of his patience and forbearance: *'He may come in the second watch, he may come in the third*

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[3] 1 Co 15:34 [4] Rm 13:11 [5] Mt 8:11 [6] Jn 19:37
[7] Is 26:10 (LXX)

watch; happy are those servants if he finds them ready.' The first watch is the very earliest time of life, childhood; the second watch is young adulthood; the third watch we take to be old age. Let one, then, who was unwilling to keep awake during the first watch take care for the second, so that one who neglected to turn from his evil ways during childhood may watch the way he lives at least during his adult life. And let one who was unwilling to keep awake during the second watch not lose the means of healing given him during the third, so that one who did not watch the way he lived during his adult life may at least come to his senses in his old age.

Consider, dearly beloved, how God's love has found a way through our obstinacy. We have no excuse now. We despise God, and he waits. He sees himself rejected, and he calls us back. He accepts the insult of our rejection, and nevertheless he promises us a gift as often as we return. But let no one be neglectful because of his forbearance. The longer he extended his patience before the judgment the stricter will be the justice he demands there. That is why Paul said: *Do you not know that the patience of God is leading you to repentance? But you in the hardness of your unrepentant hearts are storing up for yourself anger on the day of anger and of the revelation of the just judgment of God;*[8] and the psalmist: *God is a just judge, strong and forbearing.*[9] Before he called him forbearing he said that he was just, so that you would know that the one you see bearing long and patiently with the sins of transgressors will finally judge them very severely. Hence there is said by a certain wise man: *God is patient in repaying.*[10] He is said to be patient in repaying because he repays the sins of men patiently; those whom he bears with for a long time that they may be converted are condemned more harshly when they are not.

To drive slothfulness from our hearts he brings forward external losses by way of comparison.[4*] This is to arouse us to concern for ourselves. He says: *But know this, that if the householder had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would certainly have watched and not allowed his home to be broken into.* And after this comparison he adds a word of exhortation: *And you too be ready, because the Son of Man is coming at an hour that you do not expect.* While the householder is unaware, the thief breaks into his house. When our spirit is asleep and has no concern for itself, death comes unexpectedly, bursting into the dwelling of our body, and killing the master of the house it finds sleeping. When the spirit does not foresee its coming losses, death carries it off all unaware to punishment. If it were watching it would resist the thief. Trying to guard against the coming of the Judge who carries off the soul in secret, it would go out to meet him by repenting, so as not to perish in a state of unrepentance. But our Lord willed that our final hour be unknown to us so that our spirit may always be in a state of uncertainty. Then since we cannot exactly foresee it, we may continually make ready for it.

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[8] Rm 2:4-5 [9] Ps 7:11 (V 7:12) [10] Si 5:4

Therefore, my friends, direct the eyes of your hearts toward your mortality. Make ready for the Judge who is coming to you by your daily weeping and sorrow. Certain death awaits everyone. Do not refuse to ponder the uncertainty of your knowledge of your temporal life. Do not burden yourself with care for earthly things. No matter the weight of gold and silver put on it, no matter the costly garments clothing your body, what else is it but a body? Do not pay attention then to what you have, but to what you are. Do you want to know what you are? The prophet tells us: *Truly the people is hay.*[11] If the people is not hay, where are they who last year celebrated with you the feast of blessed Felix, which we honor today? How much thought and what great care did they give to providing for this present life? As the time of their death crept suddenly upon them, they found themselves in circumstances they had refused to foresee. At the same time they lost all the temporal things which they seemed to be holding onto, treating them as if they would last. If then such a great number of the human race who were vigorous in body from their birth have passed away, from their death have dried up into dust, it is clear that they were hay.

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[11] Is 40:7

Since the hours and their moments are running away, see to it, dearly beloved, that they are filled with what will earn the wages of a good work. Listen to what Solomon in his wisdom says: *Do vigorously everything your hand can do, because there will be no work or plan or wisdom or knowledge in the lower world, to which your are hurrying.*[12] Since we do not know the time of our coming death, and we cannot work after death, it remains for us to seize the time granted us before death. So death itself will be defeated when it comes, if we always fear it before it comes.

[12] Qo 9:10

NOTES

1. Homily 13 in Migne (*PL* 1123). Toward the end of this homily Gregory mentions the feast of a certain Felix. This is probably the martyr, Pope Saint Felix II, whose feast was celebrated on July 29, along with the martyrs Simplicius, Faustinus and Beatrice. Bu and W confirm that this gospel passage is to be read at the mass on the feast of these martyrs, July 29.
2. The remainder of this paragraph together with the six following paragraphs was taken over by Bede, except for some slight omissions, for his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 256, 992–257, 1048).
3. Two sentences used by Bede in his *Commentary on Mark* (CC 120: 604, 362/66).
4. This sentence, with the following paragraph, was used by Bede in his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 257, 1048/66).

homily 21

And when the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Salome brought sweet spices that they might come and anoint him. And very early in the morning the first day of the week they came to the tomb at sunrise. And they said to themselves, who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb. And when they looked they saw that the stone had been rolled away, and it was very large. And entering the tomb they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment, and they were frightened. And he said to them, 'Do not be terrified. You seek Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified. He is risen. He is not here. Look at the place where they laid him. But go, say to his disciples and Peter that he is going on ahead of you into Galilee. You will see him there as he said to you.'

(Mark 16:1-7)[1]*

I have been accustomed to speak to you on many of the readings, dearly beloved, using material I have dictated. But when my throat is sore and I am unable to read to you myself what I have dictated, I see that some of you are less inclined to listen. Hence I want to depart from my usual custom and carry out myself this explanation of the lessons of the holy Gospel during the sacred solemnity of the mass, not dictating but addressing you in person. Thus you will take it in as I speak, because the voice of someone addressing you stirs up apathetic hearts better than the utterance of a lesson; by its evident concern it moves them to become alert. I see indeed that I am unequal to this task, but love provides the strength which my unskillfulness denies me. For I know the one who said: *Open your mouth, and I will fill it.*[1] May my intention be good, then, for it will be carried

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1. Ps 81:10 (V 80:11)

to completion by divine help. The great solemnity of the Lord's resurrection also gives me boldness in speaking. It is very unbecoming that my body's tongue refrain from uttering due praise on the very day on which its Maker's body rose.

You have heard, dearly beloved, that holy women[2*] who had followed the Lord came to the sepulchre with spices. They had loved him when he was alive, and they showed him their eager tenderheartedness even when he was dead. Their deed points to something that must be done in our holy Church. Thus as we hear of what they did, we must also think of our responsibility to imitate them. We too, who believe in him who died, approach his[3*] sepulchre with spices if we are strengthened with the sweet smell of the virtues, and if we seek the Lord with a reputation for good works. And the women who came with spices saw[4*] angels, since those who advance toward God through their holy desires, accompanied by the sweet smell of the virtues, behold the citizens from on high.

We should note, however, what it means that they observed the angel seated on the right side. What indeed does the left side mean except this present life, and what does the right side mean except eternal life?[5*] Hence it is written in the Song of Songs: *His left hand is beneath my head, and his right hand shall embrace me.*[2] Because our Redeemer[6*] had already passed beyond the corruption of the present life, it was right that the angel who had come to proclaim his everlasting life should be seated on the right side. The angel appeared clothed in a white robe to proclaim the joy of our festival day, since the whiteness of the garment declared the splendor of the solemnity. Should I say our solemnity and the angel's? To speak truly I must say that it belongs to both. Our Redeemer's resurrection was our festival day because it led us back to immortality, and also a festival day of the angels, because by recalling us to the things of heaven it completed their number. Therefore on our festival day, and theirs, an angel appeared in white garments, because our restoration to the things on high by the Lord's resurrection makes up for the losses of the country of heaven.

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[2] Sg 2:6

Let us hear what the angel said to the women: *'Do not be terrified.'* This is as much as to say: Let them be frightened who do not love the coming of those who live on high, let those be afraid who are weighed down by bodily desires and despair of being able to belong to their fellowship: but why are you who see your fellow citizens afraid? Matthew, describing the apparition of the angel, said: *Its appearance was like lightning, and its clothing like snow.*[3] In lightning, indeed, are dread and fear, but in snow there is the soothing quality of whiteness. Because almighty God is both fearful to sinners and soothing to the righteous, the angel who witnessed his resurrection aptly was described as being like lightning in look, and as being white in regard to dress. By its very sight the angel might then frighten the condemned, and reassure the devout.

It was also fitting that a pillar of fire preceded the Israelites as they progressed through the desert[4] during the night, and a pillar of a cloud during the day. There is dread in fire, but a gentle soothing quality in the sight of a cloud. 'Day' is understood to indicate the life of the righteous, and 'night' that of the sinner. Hence Paul said to sinners who had been converted, *You were once darkness, but are now light in the Lord.*[5] The pillar was revealed as a cloud during the day and as fire during the night since almighty God will appear soothing to the righteous and dreadful to the unrighteous. When he comes at the judgment, he will reassure the former by his gentleness and mildness, and cause dread in the latter by the strictness of his justice.

Let us hear what the angel adds: *'You seek Jesus of Nazareth.'* In Latin, the name Jesus is[7]* interpreted

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[3] Mt 28:3 [4] Ex 13:22 [5] Eph 5:8

'salvation-bearing', that is, 'savior'. Since many persons then could have been named Jesus, not as expressive of their essence but only as a name, Nazareth, the place, was added to make clear which Jesus was meant; and the angel immediately added the cause of his death, *'the crucified one'*, and said, *'He is not here'*. 'He is not here', was said of his physical presence; the presence of his majesty was never absent. *'But go, say to his disciples and Peter that he is going on ahead of you into Galilee.'* We must ask why Peter is distinguished by his name from 'the disciples'. If the angel had not expressly named him who had denied his master,[6] he would not have dared to come with the others. He was called by name so that he would not lose hope as a result of his denial. In this connection we must ask ourselves why almighty God allowed the one he had decided to put over the entire Church to be afraid of the voice of a serving maid, and to deny him. Surely we recognize that it was done by an act of divine goodness, so that he who was going to be shepherd of the Church might learn from his own fault how he ought to have mercy on others. Accordingly, God first made him known to himself, and then put him over others, that he might perceive from his own weakness how mercifully he ought to put up with the weaknesses of others.

It is aptly said of our Redeemer that: *'He is going on ahead of you into Galilee. You will see him there, as he said to you.'* Galilee is interpreted, 'the passing has been completed'.[8]* In truth our Redeemer had now passed from his passion to his resurrection, from his death to life, from punishment to glory, from corruption to incorruption. After his resurrection he was first seen by his disciples in Galilee, because we will happily see the glory of his resurrection later if we now pass from vices to the height of virtue. And so he who was proclaimed at the sepulchre was to be seen at 'the passing', because he who is acknowledge on the occasion of his physical death is seen in 'the passing' of his heart.

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6. Mt 26: 69-74

I have completed, dearly beloved, what I have to say in explaining the lesson from the Gospel on this great solemnity. But I still wish to say something more penetrating about it. There were two lives. One we know about; of the other we are ignorant; one is mortal, the other immortal; one is corruptible, the other incorruptible; one ends in death, the other in resurrection. But *the mediator between God and men, the man, Christ Jesus,*[7] came. He took upon himself the one, and revealed to us the other; the one he bore by dying, and the other he revealed by rising. If he had promised resurrection of the body to us who knew this mortal life, but did not visibly manifest it, who would have believed his promises? Accordingly, he became a human being and appeared in bodily form; he condescended to die of his own free-will; he rose by his own power; he showed by his example what he promised us as a reward.

But someone may say that it was no wonder that he rose, he who was God and could not be bound by death. To instruct us then in our ignorance, and to strengthen our weakness, he decided that the example of his own resurrection should not be unique. He alone died at that time, and yet he was not the only one who rose for it is written that: *Many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep arose.*[8] And so all arguments of doubters are demolished. To prevent our saying that no one should expect in his own case what the God-man showed in his body, we see that human beings rose together with God; and we do not doubt that they were truly human beings. If we are members of our Redeemer, then, let us believe that what occurred in our Head will take place also in us. If we are greatly disheartened concerning ourselves, we who are last of his members must hope for what we hear said of his own earlier members.

There comes now to mind what the Jews said derisively of the crucified Son of God: *If he is the king of Israel, let him come down from the cross, and we will believe in him.*[9] If he had then come down from the cross, yielding to their derision, he would not have showed to us the virtue of patience. Instead he waited for a while, he put up with their taunts, he bore with their mockery, he preserved his patience, he deferred their esteem, and he who was unwilling to come down from the cross rose from the sepulchre. It was a greater thing to rise from the sepulchre than to come down from the cross, a greater thing to destroy death by rising than to preserve life by coming down. When the Jews beheld him not coming down from the cross at their derisive remarks, when they saw him dying, they believed that they had prevailed, and rejoiced that they had consigned his name to oblivion. But see how his name, which the unbelieving multitude believed it had consigned to oblivion as a result of his death, increased throughout the world, how the multitude which rejoiced over his killing grieved over his death. They perceived that through his suffering he had arrived at glory.

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[7] 1 Tm 2:5 [8] Mt 27:52 [9] Mt 27:42

Samson, in the book of Judges, foreshadowed this by his deeds.[10] When he had entered Gaza, a city of the Philistines, they immediately knew of his entry. They quickly surrounded the city with a blockade and assigned guards, and they rejoiced at having now apprehended Samson who was so extremely strong. But we know what Samson did. At midnight he carried off the gates of the city and ascended to the top to the hill. Whom, dearly beloved, whom does Samson foreshadow by his deed but our Redeemer? What does the city of Gaza signify if not the lower world? What is indicated by the Philistines except the faithlessness of the Jews? When they saw that the Lord was dead and his body had been laid in the sepulchre, they assigned guards there.[11] They were happy that they caught and held him, who shone out as the creator of life, behind the defense of the lower world, as Samson had been held in Gaza. Samson not only went out at midnight but even carried off the gates of the city, because our Redeemer, rising before it was light, not only went out free from the lower world, but even destroyed its very defenses. He bore the gates, and went up to the top of the hill, because by rising he carried off the defenses of the lower world, and by ascending he passed into the kingdom of heaven.

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[10] Jg 16:1-3
[11] Mt 27:62-66

Dearly beloved, let us love wholeheartedly this resurrection of our Saviour, which was indicated first by a sign, and then made clear by a deed. Let us die for love of him. You see that in the resurrection of our Maker we have recognized that the angels, his servants, are our fellow citizens. Let us hasten to their well-teeming festival, let us join with them in desire and in heart, since we cannot yet see it with our eyes. Let us pass from vice to virtue, so that we may be worthy to see our Redeemer in Galilee. Almighty God, who gave his only Son on our behalf in death, aids our desire for life. Through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with him in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.

NOTES

1. Homily 21 in Migne (*PL* 1169). Both Bu and W list this as the Gospel pericope to be read for Easter Sunday. Gregory's own words in the opening paragraph also amply show that it was on Easter day that he delivered this sermon.
2. Two sentences taken over by Bede for his *Commentary on Mark* (CC 120: 639, 1727/30).
3. Another sentence used by Bede in his *Commentary on Mark* (CC 120: 639, 1730/33)
4. Four more sentences used by Bede in his *Commentary on Mark* (CC 120: 640, 1761/68).
5. A similar thought is expressed by Gregory in his *Commentary on Ezechiel* (CC 142: 285, 342/43).
6. The remaining part of this paragraph, plus the first six sentences of the following paragraph, was adopted by Bede for use in his *Commentary on Mark* (CC 120: 640, 1772 - 641, 1798).
7. This and the following paragraph were used by Bede in his *Commentary on Mark* (CC 120: 641, 1799 - 642, 1827). The second sentence is derived from Saint Jerome's *Interpretation of Hebrew Names* (CC 72: 76, 28).
8. This meaning of the Hebrew word, Galilee, is taken from Saint Jerome's *Interpretation of Hebrew Names* (CC 72: 131, 2).

homily 22

> *The first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, when it was still dark, and saw the stone taken away from the tomb. Then she ran and came to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved and said to them, 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb and we do not know where they have laid him'. Peter therefore rushed out, and that other disciple, and came to the tomb. They both ran together and the other disciple outran Peter and came first to the tomb. And stooping down and looking in, he saw the linen clothes lying there, yet he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb and saw the linen clothes lying there, and the napkin which was around his head, not lying with the linen clothes but wrapped together in a place by itself. Then that other disciple who had come first to the tomb went in and he saw and believed. For they did not yet know the scripture, that he must rise from the dead.*
>
> (John 20:1-9)[1]*

My throat has been affected by a long-lasting illness, and I've been prevented for some time from giving you an explanation of the Gospel lesson. My voice has lost its power, and because not many are able to hear me I am reluctant, I admit, to speak to a large group. But I reproach myself for my hesitation. And why? If I am not able to help many, shall I not attend to the needs of a few? And if I am not able to carry back many sheaves from the harvest, ought I to return to the threshing-floor empty? Even though I am not able to carry as many as I ought, let me at least carry a few, or even two, or even one. An effort put forth in weakness has its certain reward. Our Judge on high, although he has regard for the burden in fixing our recompense, still considers our strength in relation to the burden.

The lesson from the holy Gospel which you have just heard, my friends, is quite clear on the surface, that is in its historical meaning, but we must still inquire briefly into its mystical meaning. Mary Magdalene came to the sepulchre when it was still dark. We note the hour historically, but we who seek understanding must find what is mystically intended. Mary was looking for the Creator of all things, whom she had see physically dead in the sepulchre. Because she did not find any trace of him, she believed that he had been stolen away. It was still dark when she came to the sepulchre; and she ran quickly, and proclaimed this to the disciples. Peter and John, the ones who loved more than the rest, ran more swiftly than the rest. The two ran together, but John outran Peter and came first to the sepulchre; but did not presume to enter it. Peter came after him and went in.

What, my friends, what does this running signify? Can we believe that the evangelist's very profound narrative lacks a mystical meaning? Surely not. John would not have said that he arrived first but did not enter unless he believed that there was a mystical significance to his hesitation. What does John signify, then, if not the synagogue, and Peter, if not the Church? We shouldn't be surprised to find the synagogue said to be signified by the younger apostle, and the Church by the elder, because although the synagogue was earlier than the Church of the Gentiles in worshipping God, still by the world's reckoning the multitude of Gentiles existed prior to the synagogue, as Paul testifies when he says that *it is not the spiritual which is first but the physical.*[1] And so the Church of the Gentiles is designated by the older of the two, Peter, and the synagogue of the Jews by the younger, John. They both ran together, because from the time of their beginnings right up to the end the Gentiles ran forward with the synagogue at the same pace and by a shared route, though not with the same shared understanding. The synagogue came first to the sepulchre, but did not enter, because although it received the commandments of the law and listened to prophecies of the incarnation and passion, it was unwilling to believe in the one who had died. John saw the linen cloths lying there, but even so he did not enter, because the synagogue knew the mysteries of the holy scriptures, yet put off entering by putting its faith in the Lord's passion. It had prophesied long and extensively about him, it saw him when he was present and denied him, but it rejected him, refusing to believe that God had become an embodied human being. What is meant, then, that John ran more swiftly and yet stood passively in front of the sepulchre, but Simon Peter followed him and entered the sepulchre, except that the Church of the Gentiles later followed *the mediator between God and men, the man, Jesus Christ,*[2] knowing that he was dead in respect to his body, and believing that he was alive as God? He saw the linen cloths lying there, and the napkin which had been placed upon his head, not lying with the linen cloths but rolled up apart in one place.

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[1] 1 Co 15:46

What do we believe that it means, my friends, that the napkin covering the Lord's head was not found in the sepulchre with the linen cloths? Is it not that, as Paul testifies, *The head of Christ is God,*[3] and the incomprehensible mysteries of his divinity are far removed from our weak condition, and his power exceeds our creaturely nature? And we must note that it is said to have been found not only apart but rolled up in one place. A linen cloth that is rolled up appears to have neither beginning or end; it does not come into being by birth nor is it limited by a termination. Most appropriately there is added, 'in one place', because God does not exist where hearts are divided. God exists in unity, and they deserve to have his grace who do not separate themselves from one another by the scandal of sects.

[2] 1 Tm 2:5 [3] 1 Co 11:3

Since we are accustomed to use a napkin to wipe off the perspiration of those who labor, we can also take 'napkin' to mean God's labor. God indeed remains at rest and unchangeable in himself, but nonetheless he declares that he labors when he bears with the painful wickedness of persons. Hence he says by the prophet: *I have labored and held up.*[4] But God appeared in a human body, and labored because of our weakness. When unbelievers saw this labor of his passion, they refused to worship him. They scorned to accept as immortal in his divinity one whom they saw was mortal in his human body. Hence Jeremiah says this too: *You will render them their recompense, O Lord, according to the works of their hands; you will give them your labor as a shield for their hearts.*[5] To keep the sharp points of his preaching from piercing their hearts when they scorned the labor of his passion, they held his labor as a shield, so to speak; that they saw him laboring even to death was used to prevent his words from coming to them. The napkin which had been upon the redeemer's head was found lying apart, since our Redeemer's passion is far removed from ours. He bore without fault what we put up with as a result of our faults; he freely willed to yield to the death to which he came unwillingly.

There follows: *Therefore that disciple who had come first to the sepulchre then entered also.* After Peter entered, John also went in. He who had come first entered second. We know, my friends, that at the end of the world even Judea will be brought to faith in the Redeemer. Paul testifies to this by saying: *Until the fullness of the Gentiles comes in, and thus all Israel is saved.*[6]

And he saw and believed. What, my friends, must we think that he believed? That the Lord whom they were seeking had risen? Definitely not, because it was still dark at the sepulchre; and the next words also contradict this interpretation: *For they did not yet know the scriptures, that he must*

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[4] Jr 6:11 [5] Lm 3:64–65 [6] Rm 11:25–26

rise from the dead. And so what did he see, and what did he believe? He saw the linen cloths lying there, and he believed what the woman had said, that the Lord had been taken away from the sepulchre. In this we must consider the greatness of the divine ordering of things: the hearts of the disciples were provoked to seek him, and their finding of him was deferred. Thus their weak minds, tormented by their grief, would become more adept at seeking him, and when they found him they would hold on to him more strongly in proportion to the difficulty of their search.

Dearly beloved, I have briefly discussed the Gospel lesson. It now remains for me to say something concerning the excellence of this great solemnity. I am right to speak of the excellence of this solemnity, because it surpasses all others. For just as in the sacred scriptures the Holy of Holies and the Song of Songs are so called because of their importance, so this festival can be properly called the solemnity of solemnities. In truth in this solemnity a prefiguration has been given us of our resurrection, we have been given the hope of reaching our heavenly country, and we can already anticipate the glory of the kingdom on high.

By this solemnity the elect who, protected though they were in undisturbed rest, were yet being held within the bounds of the lower world, have been brought back to the pleasant places of paradise. By his resurrection the Lord fulfilled what he said before his passion, *If I am lifted up from the earth, I shall draw all things to myself.*[7] He who left none of his elect in the lower world did indeed draw all things to himself. He took from them all the predestinate. The Lord by his rising did not restore to pardon any unbelievers, or those whose wickedness had caused them to be given over to eternal punishment; he snatched away from the confines of the lower world those whom he recognized as his own as a result of their faith and deeds. Hence he says truly by the mouth of Hosea: *O death, I will be your death; O lower*

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[7] Jn 12:32

world, I will be your bite.[8] What we slay we cause almost to pass out of existence, but we take some from what we bite and leave the rest. Because he completely slayed death in his elect, he became death for death; but because he took away a portion of the lower world, and left part of it, he did not completely slay it but took a bite from it. Therefore he said, *O death, I will be your death,* as if to say, because I am completely destroying you in my elect, *I will be your death; O lower world, I will be your bite,* because by taking some away I am partially piercing through you.

But what is this solemnity which has broken the confines of the lower world, and opened for us the gates of the heavenly kingdom? Let us examine its name more carefully; let us ask a renowned preacher. Let us see how he looks at it: *For Christ our passover has been sacrificed.*[9] If Christ is our passover, we must consider what the law says concerning the passover, to investigate more deeply whether these things can be shown to have been said about Christ. Moses said: *They will take of the blood of the lamb and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintels of the houses in which they eat it. And they shall eat its flesh that night, roasted over the fire, and unleavened bread with wild herbs; you shall not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but only what has been roasted over the fire; you shall consume its head with its legs and its inner parts, and none of it shall remain until morning, but if any of it is left over, you shall burn it in the fire.*[10] And he adds in the same place: *Thus shall you eat it: You shall gird your loins, you shall have sandals on your feet, holding your staffs in your hands, and you shall eat in haste.*[11]

All these things bring us great profit if we examine them closely, interpreting them mystically. You have learned what the Lamb's blood is, not now by hearing about it but by drinking it. This blood is put on the two doorposts when we drink it not only with our bodily mouths but also with the mouths of our hearts. It is put there when we take the sacrament of the Lord's passion into our mouths to be redeemed, when we meditate on it with attentive hearts to imitate him. Whoever receives his Redeemer's blood while no longer designing to imitate his passion has put the blood on only one of the doorposts.

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[8] Ho 13:14 [9] 1 Co 5:7 [10] Ex 12:7-10 [11] Ex 12:11

Blood must also be put on the lintels of our houses. How else are we to interpret 'houses' in a spiritual sense than as our minds, in which we dwell through our thoughts? The lintel of this house is the intention which directs our actions. Whoever directs his intentions toward imitating the Lord's passion puts the blood of the lamb on the lintel of his house. And without any doubt our houses are the bodies in which we dwell as long as we are alive. We put the blood of the lamb on the lintel of the house, because we bear the cross of his passion on our foreheads.

Moses adds concerning the lamb, *and they shall eat its flesh that night, roasted over the fire.* We who receive the Lord's body in a sacramental way eat the lamb during the night, when as yet we do not see each other's inner lives. Its flesh must be roasted over the fire because water breaks up the flesh it cooks, but fire makes firm what it cooks without water. Fire cooked the flesh of our lamb, because the violence of his passion rendered him stronger for his resurrection and he gained strength for incorruption as a result of his death: his flesh was strengthened by the fire. And so he says by the psalmist: *My strength has been dried like a piece of pottery.*[12] What is a piece of pottery before it has been fired but soft clay? Fire makes it hard. The strength of the Lord's humanity was dried like a piece of pottery because the fire of his passion caused it to increase to incorruptible strength.

But receiving our Redeemer's sacraments is not enough to make a true solemnity of the heart. We must also do good works. What value is there in partaking of his body and blood with our mouths if we oppose him with our wicked practices? And so Moses adds that *unleavened bread with wild*

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[12] Ps 22:15 (V 21:16)

herbs are to be eaten. A person eats bread without leaven who does virtuous deeds without corrupting them with vain glory, who fulfills the precepts of mercy with no addition of sin, not perversely destroying what he properly accomplishes. In reproof of some who had mingled the leaven of sin with their good deeds the Lord spoke by the voice of the prophet: *Come to Bethel and behave wickedly;*[13] and shortly after: *And make a sacrifice of praise of that which is unleavened.*[14] A person makes a sacrifice of praise of that which is unleavened when he makes ready a sacrifice for God of his plunder. Wild herbs are very bitter. The flesh of the lamb is to be eaten with wild herbs, so that when we receive our Redeemer's body we afflict ourselves with weeping for our sins. Thus the bitterness of repentance purges our heart's stomach of all traces of a wicked life.

Then comes: *You shall not eat any of it raw or boiled in water.* The words of the narrative already cause us to turn away from a literal interpretation. Were the Israelites living in Egypt accustomed to eating lamb raw, my friends, that the law said to them: *You shall not eat any of it raw?* And then, *or boiled in water.* What does water signify but human knowledge? This is in accord with Solomon's words implying the voice of heretics: *Stolen waters are sweeter.*[15] What does the Lamb's raw flesh indicate but his humanity that has been thoughtlessly and irreverently disregarded? Everything which we think of profoundly we cook, as it were, in our minds. The flesh of the lamb was not to be eaten raw or boiled in water, because our Redeemer is not to be judged merely a human being nor are we to use human science to explain how God could have been made man. What is anyone who believes that our Redeemer was merely a human being doing but eating the flesh of the lamb raw, being unwilling to cook it by understanding his divinity? And anyone trying to examine the mystery of his having become man according to human wisdom wishes to boil the flesh

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13. Am 4:4 14. Am 4:5 15. Pr 9:17

of the lamb in water, that is, to delve into the mystery of the divine plan by imperfect knowledge. And so let no one who desires to celebrate the solemn festival of paschal joy boil the lamb in water or eat it raw, seeking to pierce the depths of his having become human by human wisdom, or believing in him as merely a human person. Rather let him eat its flesh roasted over the fire, that he may know that all things have been carried out through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Concerning this Moses added: *You shall consume its head with its legs and its inner parts.* Our Redeemer is the Alpha and the Omega,[16] God before time began, and a human person at the end of time. To consume the head of the lamb is to comprehend his divinity by faith. Consuming the legs of the lamb means eagerly searching for traces of his humanity by loving and imitating him. What are the Lamb's inner parts if they are not hidden and mystical precepts of his words? These we consume when we take in the words of life with eager desire. What is he reproving by this mention of consuming except the dull indolence of us who neither seek after his words and mysteries on our own, nor willingly listen to his words from others?

None of it shall remain until morning. We are to examine his sayings with great care, and delve into all his precepts by understanding and working in this night of present life, before the day of the resurrection appears. But because it is hard for us to be able to understand every sacred thought and to delve into every one of his mysteries, he duly added: *But if any of it is left over, you shall burn it in the fire.* We burn what remains of the lamb in the fire when we humbly reserve to the power of the Holy Spirit whatever we are unable to understand or delve into concerning the mystery of his having become man, so that no one dares proudly to reject or denounce what he does not understand, but gives this over to the fire when he reserves it for the Holy Spirit.

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[16] Rv 1:8

Since we now know how the passover is to be eaten, now let us recognize what sort of persons are to eat it. There follows: *Thus however shall you eat it: You shall gird your loins.* What is meant by the loins but the pleasures of the body? Hence the psalmist also begs the Lord to *Burn my loins.*[17] Unless he knew that the pleasure of sensual desire was in the loins, he wouldn't have asked that they be burned. And because the devil's power over the human race has been strong particularly through dissoluteness, it was said of him by the Lord's voice: *His power is in his loins.*[18] The person who eats the passover ought to have his loins girded, that anyone who celebrates the solemnity of resurrection and incorruption no longer be under any power of corruption because of his vices, and subdue his pleasurable desires, and keep his body from dissoluteness. No one still under the power of corruption because of his lack of self-control completely understands what the solemnity of incorruption means. This is hard for some, but *the gate which leads to life is narrow.*[19] And we have seen many examples of people who have been self-controlled.

And then: *You shall have sandals on your feet.* What are our feet but our works, and what are sandals but the skins of dead animals? Sandals protect the feet. What are the dead animals whose skins protect our feet except the ancient fathers who have gone before us to our eternal homeland? When we regard their example, we protect our feet which are our works. Therefore to have sandals on our feet means to regard the lives of those who are dead, and to guard our footsteps against the wounds of sin.

And: *Holding your staffs in your hands.* What does the law indicate by the staff except pastoral guardianship? We must note that we are first admonished to gird our loins, and only then to have a staff in our hands, because they ought to undertake pastoral care who already know how to subdue the movements of dissoluteness in their own bodies. Then when they preach about hard things to others, they themselves do not give in weakly to their own intemperate desires.

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[17] Ps 26:2 (V 25:2)
[18] Jb 40:16 (V 40:11)
[19] Mt 7:14

And then: *And you shall eat it with haste.* Note, my friends, note what is said: *with haste.* Acquaint yourself with the commandments of God, the mysteries of our Redeemer, the joys of our heavenly country with haste; take care to fulfill the commands of life with haste. We know that it is still possible for us to do good today, but we do not know whether it will be possible tomorrow. Eat the passover with haste, that is, throb with longing for the solemnity of our heavenly country. No one should be inactive on the journey of this life, or he may lose his place in his own country. No one should bring forward reasons for delay in his intentions, but let each one complete what is begun, lest it become impossible for him to carry out what he has started. If we are not slow to love God, he whom we love will help us, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.

NOTES

1. Homily 22 in Migne (*PL* 1174). Both N and Bu note that this is the Gospel passage to be read at the mass on the Monday after Easter.

homily 23

Two of them went that same day to a village called Emmaus, which is about three-score furlongs from Jerusalem. And they talked together about all the things which had happened. And while they were talking together, Jesus himself came near and went with them. But their eyes were closed that they should not know him. And he said to them, 'What sort of conversation is this you are having as you walk along and are sad?' And one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, 'Are you only a stranger in Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there these days?' And he said to them, 'What things?' And they said to him, 'Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people. And how the chief priests and our rulers delivered him to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we trusted that he would redeem Israel. And besides all this, today is the third day since these things happened. And certain women of our company astonished us. They went early to the tomb and when they did not find his body they came saying they had seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. And some of those with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said. But him they did not see.' And he said to them, 'O foolish and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have written. Did not the Christ have to suffer these thing and enter into his glory?' And beginning with Moses and the prophets, he expounded to them the things in scripture concerning himself. And they approached the village they were going to and he made as if he would have gone farther. But they restrained him, saying, 'Stay with us, for it is nearly evening and the day is far spent.' And he went into stay with them. And it came to pass, as he sat at supper with them, that he took bread and blessed it, and broke

> *and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened and they knew him, and he vanished out of their sight. And they said to one another, 'Did our hearts not burn within us while he talked with us on the way and when the opened the scriptures to us?' And the got up that same hour and returned to Jerusalem and found the eleven gathered together and those who were with them, saying, 'The Lord is risen indeed and has appeared to Simon.' And they told about the things that were done along the way and how he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread.*
>
> (Luke 24: 13–35)[1]*

I must address a few words to you, even though you are in the midst of a weekday celebration. My words may even be more helpful, since often nourishment that is barely sufficient is more eagerly consumed. I have determined to examine the meaning of the Gospel reading summarily and not word by word, lest an overlong explanation be a burden upon your kindness.

You have heard, dearly beloved, that the Lord appeared to two disciples while they were walking on the road. They were talking about him, even though they did not believe. He did not show them an appearance[2]* which they could recognize, but the Lord behaved before the eyes of their bodies in accord with what was going on inwardly before the eyes of their hearts. Within themselves they were both loving and doubting; and the Lord was present to them outwardly, but did not show them who he was. He manifested his presence to them as they talked about him, but hid the appearance by which they would recognize him on account of their doubts.

He did indeed talk with them, reproving the hardness of their understanding and opening to them the mysteries of holy scripture concerning himself: and yet, because as an object of faith he was still a stranger to their hearts, he made a pretense of going on farther. One can make a pretence as one can make a pot.[3]* On this occasion the perfect Truth did nothing deceitful;[4]* he was only manifesting himself to them materially as they were thinking of him. It had to be shown whether those who did not as yet love him as God were at least able to love him as a stranger. Since those with whom Truth was walking couldn't be alien to charity, they invited him, a stranger, to be their guest.

But why do I say they invited him, when it is written that *they compelled* him? We must surely infer from this example that strangers are not only to be invited to be guests but even forcibly persuaded. They set the table, brought food, and recognized in the breaking of the bread the God they did not know as he explained the sacred scriptures. They were not enlightened by hearing God's commandments, but by their own actions, for it is written: *It is not hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but doers of the law will be made righteous.*[1] Let anyone who wishes to understand what he has heard be quick to fulfil in action what he has already been able to understand. The Lord was not recognized when he was speaking, but he deigned to be recognized as he was being fed.

Dearly beloved, love hospitality, love the works of charity. Paul said: *Let the charity of the brotherhood remain, and do not forget hospitality; it was by this that some have been made acceptable, having entertained angels hospitably;*[2] and Peter told us to be *hospitable towards one another, without complaint;*[3] and Truth himself said: *I needed hospitality, and you welcomed me.*[4]

Here is an incident generally believed, handed down to us by the reports of our elders. A certain head of a family with his entire household zealously practised hospitality. Every day he received strangers at his table, and on a certain day a nameless stranger came among them and was brought to the table. As was his humble custom, the head of the family wished to pour water for his hands. He turned to get the pitcher, but suddenly he could not find the person on whose hands he had intended to pour the water. He wondered at what had happened; and on that same night the Lord said to him in a vision: 'On other days you received me in my members; yesterday you received me in person.' You know that when he comes in judgment he will say, *What you did to one of these, my least ones, you did for me.*[5] You know that before the judgment, when he is received in his members, he is himself searching for those who will receive him. And yet we are disinclined to offer the gift of hospitality. Consider, my friends, how great the virtue of hospitality is. Receive Christ at your tables so that you can be received by him at the eternal banquet. Offer hospitality now to Christ the stranger, that at the judgment you may not be a stranger, unknown to him, but may be received into his kingdom as one of his own.

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[1] Rm 2:13 [2] Heb 13:1-2 [3] 1 P 4:9 [4] Mt 25:35

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[5] Mt 25:40

NOTES

1. Homily 23 in Migne (*PL* 1182). The notation in the margin of Gospel book N has it that this was the passage to be read on the Tuesday following Easter Sunday, whereas the indications in Bu and W mark it as the one to be read on Easter Monday.
2. This sentence, plus the two following sentences, were taken over for use by Bede in *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 414, 2039/46).
3. There is a play on words here: *Fingere namque conponere dicimus; unde et conpositores luti figulos vocamus.* The verb *fingo* (to invent, feign) and the noun *figulus* (a potter) have a common root.
4. Eight sentences adopted by Bede for his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 416, 2100/2116).

homily 24

After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias in this way: Simon Peter and Thomas called the Twin and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and another two of his disciples were together. Simon Peter said to them, 'I'm going fishing'. They said to him, 'We will go with you'. They went out and got on a ship immediately. And that night they caught nothing. But when morning came, Jesus stood on the shore. But the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Then Jesus said to them, 'Children, have you no food?' They replied, No. And he said to them, 'Cast your net on right side of the boat and you will find some fishes'. They cast and were not able to draw in the net for all the fish. Then that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, 'It is the Lord'. When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his fisherman's coat, for he was naked, and threw himself into the sea. And the other disciples came in a small ship, for they were not far from shore, perhaps two hundred cubits, dragging the net with the fish in it. As soon as they had come ashore, they saw a fire of coals there and fish laid on it and bread. Jesus said to them, 'Bring some of the fish you have caught'. Simon Peter got up and brought the net to land full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three, and although there were so many the net was not broken. Jesus said to them, 'Come and eat'. And none of the disciples dared to ask him, Who are you, knowing it was the Lord. Then Jesus came and took bread and gave it to them, and also the fish. This is now the third time that Jesus showed himself to his disciples after he had risen from the dead.

(John 21:1–14)[1]*

The lesson from the holy Gospel which was just read in your hearing, my friends, raises a question in the mind, and the fact that it does raise a question shows the need for discretion. Indeed we may ask why Peter, who was a fisherman before his conversion, returned to his fishing after his conversion. Since Truth says, *No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God,*[1] why did he return to what he had abandoned? But if we consider the virtue of discretion, we quickly see that it was not a fault in him that he returned even after his conversion without sin. We know that Peter was a fisherman,[2] whereas Matthew was a tax collector.[3] Peter returned to fishing after his conversion, but Matthew did not again sit down to his business of tax collecting, because it is one thing to seek to make a living by fishing, and another to increase one's gains by money from the tax office. There are many occupations we cannot practice either partially or completely without sin. No one is allowed to take up again after his conversion those that are involved with sin.

The question also rises as to why, after his resurrection, the Lord stood on the shore while his disciples were laboring in the sea, when before his resurrection he walked on the waves of the sea[4] in his disciples' sight. We quickly perceive the reason for this if we consider the circumstances of each occasion. What does the sea indicate but the present age, which is disturbed by the uproar of circumstances and the commotion of this perishable life? What does the solidity of the shore signify but the uninterrupted continuance of eternal peace? Therefore since the disciples were still held in the waves of this mortal life, they were laboring on the sea. But since our Redeemer had already passed beyond his perishable body, after his resurrection he stood on the shore as if he were speaking to his disciples by his actions of the mystery of his resurrection: I am not now appearing to you on the sea, because I am not with you in the waves of confusion. It is for this reason that he said in another place to these same disciples after his resurrection: *These are the words I spoke to you when I was still with you.*[5] It was not that he wasn't with them when he appeared to them as a bodily presence; he said that he wasn't present with them since he in his immortal body was apart from their mortal bodies. He also disclosed here by the place he was standing when he showed himself on shore while they were still at sea, what he professed when he was with them, that he was not really with them.

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[1] Lk 9:62 [2] Mt 4:18 [3] Mt 9:9 [4] Mt 14:25

The disciples had great difficulty in their fishing, in order that, when their master came, great glory and triumph might be his. At once he said: *'Cast your net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some fishes.'* We read twice in the holy Gospel that the Lord ordered that nets be let down for fishing, before his passion,[6] and after his resurrection. Before our Redeemer suffered and rose, he ordered the net let down for fishing, but he didn't say whether it was to be cast on the right side or the left. Appearing to his disciples after his resurrection, he ordered that the net be let down on the right side. In the earlier catch so many fish were taken that the nets were torn, but in the later even though many fish were taken, the nets were not torn. Everyone knows that the good are designated by the right side and the wicked on the left,[7] and so, in the earlier catch in which no particular order was given as to the side where the net should be cast, the Church of the present time has signified. The Church takes the good along with the wicked. It does not choose those it brings in, because it is ignorant of those whom it can choose. The later catch, after the Lord's resurrection, takes place only on the right side, since only the Church of the elect, which will possess nothing of the works of the left side, will come to see the glory of his brightness. In the earlier catch[2*] the net was broken on account of the great number of fish, because a large

[5] Lk 24:44 [6] Lk 5:4-6 [7] Mt 25:33

number of the wicked now enters to confession the faith with the elect, and they tear the Church itself apart with their heresies. In the later catch many large fish are caught, and the net is untorn, because the holy Church of the elect remains in the uninterrupted peace of its creator and no dissension tears it apart.

After catching such large fish, *Simon Peter got up and brought the net to the land.* I believe that you, dear listeners, now perceive why it was Peter who brought the net to land. Our holy Church had been entrusted to him;[8] it was to him individually that it was said: *Simon, son of John, do you love me? Feed my sheep.*[9] What was afterwards disclosed to him in words was now indicated to him by an action. Because the Church's preacher was to part us from the waves of this world, it was surely necessary that Peter bring the net full of fish to land. He dragged the fish to the firm ground of the shore, because by his preaching he revealed to the faithful the stability of our eternal home. He accomplished this by his words and by his letters, and he accomplishes it daily by his miraculous signs. As often as he serves us from the uproar of earthly affairs, what occurs is that we are caught like fish in the net of the faith and brought to shore.

When the net is said to be full of large fish, we are told how many, namely one hundred and fifty-three.

The number has a deep and mysterious meaning, but the depth of so great a mystery confronts you as you contemplate it. The evangelist would not have told us the exact number unless he had judged it replete with mystery. You know that in the Old Testament every work is prescribed by the ten commandments, but in the New Testament the power of the same work is given to the increased number of faithful through the sevenfold grace of the Holy Spirit. The prophet foretells this when he speaks of *the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and strength, the spirit of knowledge and devotion, and he filled him with the spirit*

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[8] Mt 16:18 [9] Jn 21:17

of the fear of the Lord.[10] A person acquires the ability to work in this Spirit who acknowledges faith in the Trinity, believing that Father and Son and the same Holy Spirit are one power, and confessing that they are of one substance. Because there are seven commandments, given, as I've said, more widely by the New Testament, and ten given by the Old Testament, all of our power and work can be fully comprised by ten and seven. Let us multiply this seventeen by three, and we have fifty-one. This number possessed a deep and mysterious meaning, because we read in the Old Testament that the fiftieth year, in which the entire people is to rest from all work, is to be called a jubilee.[11] True rest, though, consists in unity, since what is one cannot be divided: where there is division and separation there is no true rest. Let us multiply fifty-one by three, then, and we have one hundred and fifty-three. Because all our work, practised through belief in the Trinity, tends toward rest, we multiply seventeen by three to arrive at fifty-one; and our true rest exists when even now we recognize the glory of the Trinity, which we hold as certainly existing in the unity of the divinity; and so we multiply fifty-one by three, and hold the complete number of the elect in our heavenly home to be like that number of one hundred and fifty-three fish. And so the net that was let down after the Lord's resurrection was suited to catch a number of fish that would indicate the elect in our celestial home.

While we are on this subject, both yesterday's reading from the holy Gospel and today's suggest that we carefully examine why we read that our Lord and Redeemer ate some broiled fish after his resurrection. No action that is repeated is without a mystical meaning. In this present reading he ate bread and broiled fish, but in yesterday's[3*] he ate some honeycomb with the broiled fish.[12] What do we believe the broiled fish signifies if not the[4*] *Mediator between God and men*[13] who suffered?[5*] He who condescended to conceal himself in the waters of the human race, wished to be caught in the net of our death, and he was broiled, so to speak, by turmoil at the time of his passion. But the one who condescended to be broiled like a fish in his passion became a honeycomb for us in his resurrection. And did not the one who intended to prefigure the turmoil of his passion by the broiled fish, intend to indicate the two natures of his person by the honeycomb? a honeycomb is honey in wax, and honey in wax is divinity in a human being. This interpretation is not at variance with our present reading, for he ate broiled fish and bread. The one who wished to be broiled as a fish in his human nature fed us with the bread of his divinity when he said: *I am the living bread which came down from heaven.*[14] And so he ate broiled fish and bread to show us by this food that he bore his passion in our human nature, and also provided food for us in his divine nature.

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[10] Is 11:2-3 [11] Lv 25:10-12 [12] Lk 24:41-43 [13] 1 Tm 2:5

If we look at this carefully, we can also see how it provides something for us to imitate. Our Redeemer[6*] discloses his actions so as to provide a way of imitation to those of us who follow him. In the food he ate our Lord wished to join honeycomb and broiled fish since he receives into eternal rest those in his body who do not retreat from their love of inner delight when they experience tribulation here for his sake. He ate honeycomb with broiled fish because those who here endure affliction for the sake of the truth are satisfied there with true delight.

We must also note that the Lord is described as having had his final banquet with seven disciples. Peter and Thomas, Nathanael, the sons of Zebedee, and two other of his disciples are remembered as having been there. Why did he do this if not to declare that only those filled with the sevenfold grace of the Holy Spirit would be with him at his eternal meal? All time here unrolls in seven days, and the number seven indicates those who now rise above earthly

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14. Jn 6:51

things in their pursuit of perfection, who are not bound by love of this world, who when tempted by anything at all do not suppress the desires that have arisen in them, they are the ones who feast at this final banquet in the presence of Truth. John says elsewhere of this final banquet: *Blessed are they who are called to the marriage supper of the lamb.*[15] He does not tell that they had been called to a luncheon since a banquet is a meal at the end of the day. Those who come to the refreshment of heavenly contemplation at the end of this present life are not called to a luncheon with the lamb but to his supper. This final banquet at which the seven disciples are remembered to have been present represents that supper because, as I have said, an inner refreshment will then renew those who are now filled with the sevenfold grace, and who eagerly desire it with spiritual love.

Act upon these things, my friends. Desire to be filled with the presence of this Spirit; weigh carefully what can come to you in the future as a result of the present. Consider if you are filled with this Spirit, and you will know if you are able to arrive at that banquet. Whoever is not now renewed by the Spirit surely will fast at that eternal banquet. Recall what Paul says concerning the Spirit: *If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to him.*[16] This Spirit of love is a kind of mark, so to speak, of divine possession. Does a person have the Spirit of Christ whose mind is destroyed by hatred, puffed up with pride, irritated by anger to the point of weakness, tormented by avarice, enfeebled by dissoluteness? Consider what the Spirit of Christ is. It is the Spirit of Christ which makes us love our friends and enemies, disdain earthly things, burn with eagerness for the things of heaven, mortify our bodies on account of their vices, restrain our hearts from following their desires.

If you wish to recognize the privilege of being possessed by God, consider carefully the person of the one who possesses you. What I have been saying is what Paul most truthfully proclaims: *If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to him.*[17] What he means is that no one not now governed by the God who dwells within will afterwards rejoice at the sight of the divine glory. But yet we are not inclined toward these things that have been described, we have not yet arrived at the Summit of perfection; let us daily direct the footsteps of our holy desire in the way of God. Truth comforts us when it says by the psalmist: *Your eyes have seen my lack of perfection, and all will be written in your book.*[18] Our imperfection will not be entirely harmful to us if we are set on our journey toward God, if we do not look back at the things that are finished with, if we hasten to accomplish what lies ahead. An imperfect person who worthily enkindles his desires may become strong enough to become perfect, through our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with him in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

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[15] Rv 19:9 [16] Rm 8:9

17. Rm 8:9   18. Ps 139:16 (V 138:16)

NOTES

1. Homily 24 in Migne (*PL* 1184). This Gospel passage is designated in all three Gospel books, N, Bu and W, as the one to be read on the Wednesday after Easter.
2. A single sentence used by Bede in his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 114, 580/83).
3. The reference here is probably to Lk 24:36–49, which N indicates as the Gospel lesson for the Thursday after Easter, and Lk 24:36–47, which Bu and W assign to the Tuesday after Easter. No homily of Gregory's is extant for this day.
4. Four sentences that were taken over by Bede for use in his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 421, 2308/17). The main part of the final one of these sentences is also to be found in his *Commentary on the Song of Songs* (CC 119B: 260, 610/11).
5. Broiled (*assum*). . . suffered (*passum*).
6. Three sentences adopted by Bede in his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 421, 2317/23).

homily 25

But Mary stood outside the sepulchre weeping. And as she wept she stooped down and looked into the sepulchre. She saw two angels in white, sitting, one at the head and the one at the feet where the body of Jesus had laid. And they said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping?' And she said to them, 'Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have put him.' When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing, and she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? Whom do you seek?' She thought that it was the gardener, and said to him, 'Sir, if you have taken him away, tell me where they have put him and I will take him away.' Jesus said to her, Mary. She turned and said to him, Rabboni, which is to say, Master. Jesus said to her, 'Do not touch me, for I am not yet ascended to my Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, I ascend to my Father and your Father and to my God and your God.' Mary Magdalene came and made known to his disciples, I have seen the Lord, and that he said these things to me.

(John 20:11–18)[1]*

Mary Magdalene, *who had been a sinner in the city,*[1] loved the Truth, and so washed away with her tears the stains of wickedness. Thus was fulfilled the voice of the Truth who said: *Her many sins have been forgiven her, because she loved much.*[2] She whose sins had kept her cold afterwards burned irresistibly by loving. After she came to the sepulchre and failed to find the body of the Lord there, she believed that it had been taken away and reported this to the disciples.[3] They came, and saw, and they believed that it was as the woman had said.[4] And immediately it is written of them, *And so the disciples went back to the place where they had been;*[5] and then: *But Mary stood outside the sepulchre weeping.*

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[1] Lk 7:37 [2] Lk 7:47 [3] Jn 20:1–2

We must consider in this the woman's state of mind, that a great force of love inflamed her. When even the disciples departed from the sepulchre, she did not depart. She sought for him whom she had not found, weeping as she searched; being inflamed with the fire of her love, she burned with desire for him who she believed had been taken away. So it happened that she who stayed behind to seek him was the only one who saw him. Surely the essence of every good work is perseverance, and Truth has told us that *the person who perseveres to the end is the one who will be saved;*[6] And the Law commands that the tail of the victim is to be offered in sacrifice.[7] Now the tail is the end of a body, and that person makes a perfect offering who carries out the sacrifice of a good work to its due completion. Joseph is described as the only one of his brothers to have a tunic reaching to the ankles.[8] A tunic reaching to the ankles is a good work reaching completion.

But Mary, *while she was weeping, stooped down and looked into the sepulchre.* It is true that she had already seen that the sepulchre was empty, and had already reported that the Lord had been taken away. Why did she stoop down again, why did she again long to see? It is not enough for a lover to have looked once, because the force of love intensifies the effort of the search. She sought a first time and found nothing; she persevered in seeking, and so it happened that she found him. It came about that her unfulfilled desires increased, and as they increased they took possession of what they had found.

This is the reason the Church says of this person, her own spouse, in the Song of Songs: *Upon my bed during the night*

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4. Jn 20:3–8 5. Jn 20:10 6. Mt 24:13 7. Lv 3:9
8. Gn 37:3

I sought him whom my soul loves; I sought him and did not find him. I will rise and go about the city, through its squares and streets; I will seek him whom my soul loves.[9] In her failure to find him she redoubled her efforts saying, *I sought him and did not find him,*[10] But since discovery is not long delayed if the search is not abandoned, *The watchmen who guard the city found me, 'Have you seen him whom my soul loved?' Scarcely had I passed them by when I found him whom my soul loves.*[11]

We seek the one we love upon our[2*] beds when we sigh with longing for our Redeemer during our short period of rest during the present life. We seek him during the night, because even though our hearts are already watchful for him, our eyes are still darkened. But it remains for the person who does not find the one he loves to rise and go about the city, that is, he must travel about the holy Church of the elect with an inquiring heart; he must seek her through its streets and squares, making his way, that is, through narrow and broad places, on the watch to make inquiries if any traces of her can be found in them, because there are some, even of those leading worldly lives, who have something worth imitating of virtue in their actions. The watchmen who guard the city find us as we search, because the holy Fathers who guard the Church's orthodoxy come to meet our good efforts, to teach us, by their words of their writings. Scarcely have we passed them by when we find him whom we love. Although in his humility our Redeemer was a human being in the midst of human beings, in his divinity he was above human beings. Therefore once the watchmen have been passed by, the beloved is found, because when we consider that the prophets and the apostles are lower than he, we realize that he who is God by nature is above human beings. We first seek the one we cannot find so that when later on we find him we may hold on to him more intimately.

Holy desires, as I've told you before, increase by delay in their fulfillment; if delay causes them to fail, they were

[9] Sg 3:1–2 [10] Sg 3:2 [11] Sg 3:4

not desires. Anyone who has been able to reach out for the Truth has been on fire with this love. For this reason David said: *My soul has thirsted for the living God; when shall I come and appear before the face of God?*[12] And he counseled us, saying: *Seek his face continually.*[13] And for this reason the prophet said: *My soul has desired you in the night, and with my spirit within my breast I will watch for you in the morning;*[14] And again the Church says to him in the Song of Songs: *I have been wounded with love.*[15]

It is right that the soul after bearing in its heart a wound of love brought on by its burning desire, should reach out for healing at the sight of the doctor. And so, again, it says: *My soul melted when he spoke.*[16] The heart of a person who does not seek the face[3*] of his creator is hardened by his wickedness, because in itself it remains cold. But if it now begins to burn with the desire of following him whom it loves, it runs since the fire of love has melted it. Its desire makes it anxious. Everything that used to please it in the world seems worthless; it finds nothing agreeable outside of its creator; things that once delighted the heart afterwards become grievously oppressive. Nothing brings it consolation in its sadness as long as the one it desires is not beheld. The heart sorrows. Light itself is loathsome. Scorching fire burns away the rust of sin in the heart. The soul is inflamed as if it were gold, because gold loses its beauty through use but fire restores its brightness. So Mary loved, who turned a second time to the sepulchre she had already looked into. Let us see the result of her search, which had been redoubled by the power of love.

She saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and one at the feet where the body of Jesus had been laid. Why were two angels seen in the place of the Lord's body, one sitting at the head and the other at the feet? In Latin, the word 'angel' means 'messenger'. From his passion the message was to go out that he who was God before all ages is a human person at their end. An angel is sitting at his head, so to speak, when the Apostle preaches, *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God;*[17] and an angel is sitting at his feet when he says that *the word became flesh and dwelt among us.*[18] We can also recognize the two testaments in the two angels, one earlier, and the other later. These angels are brought together at the place of the Lord's body, because while both testaments proclaim equally the message that the Lord became a man and died and rose, the earlier testament sits at his head, so to speak, and the later at his feet.

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[12] Ps 42:2 (V 41:3)
[13] Ps 105:4 (V 104:4)
[14] Is 26:9
[15] Sg 2:5 (LXX)
[16] Sg 5:6

The two cherubim which covered the mercy seat beheld one another with their countenances turned toward it.[19] The word 'cherubim' means fullness of knowledge. What do the two cherubim signify but the two testaments? And what does the mercy seat prefigure but the Lord become a man? John says of him: *For he is the expiation*[4*] for our sins.[20] When the Old Testament declares of the Lord that something was to be done, which the New Testament proclaims has been done, it is as if the two cherubim are beholding one another while they turn their countenances towards the mercy seat. When they see the Lord become man placed between them, they do not disagree about what they see, but are of one heart in describing the mystery of his dispensation.

The angels asked Mary, saying: *'Woman, why are you weeping?' And she said to them: 'Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have put him.'* The sacred message which stirs up tears of love in us provides consolation for these tears when it promises us the sight of our Redeemer. But we should note that, in the historical sense, the woman did not say, 'They have taken away the body of my Lord', but, *'They have taken away my Lord.'* It is customary in the sacred writings that the whole is sometimes indicated[5*] by a part and the part sometimes by a whole.

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17. Jn 1:1　18. Jn 1:14　19. Ex 25:18-20　20. 1 Jn 2:2

The part indicates a whole when it is written of Jacob's sons that he went down into Egypt with seventy souls:[21] the soul did not go down into Egypt apart from their bodies, but the soul signified the entire human being, since the whole is expressed by a part. The Lord's body alone had lain in the sepulchre; Mary was not seeking the body, but the Lord who had been taken away, indicating the part by the whole.

When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing, and she did not know that it was Jesus. Mary, who was still in doubt about the Lord's resurrection, turned round to see Jesus. By this doubt she had turned her back to the face of the Lord, whom she did not believe had risen. Because she loved, and doubted, she saw and did not recognize him. Her love revealed him to her, and her doubt prevented her from knowing him. What follows indicates her continued lack of recognition:

He said to her: 'Woman, why are you weeping? Whom do you seek?' He asked the reason for her sorrow to increase her desire, so that when he asked whom she was seeking she might feel a more vehement love for him.

She thought that it was the gardener, and said to him: 'Sir, if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will take him away.' Perhaps this woman was not as mistaken as she appeared to be when she believed that Jesus was a gardener. Was he not spiritually a gardener for her, when he planted the fruitful seeds of virtue in her heart by the force of his love? But why did she say to the one she saw and believed to be the gardener, when she had not yet told him whom she was seeking, *'Sir, if you have taken him away'?* She had not yet said who it was who made her weep from desire, or mentioned him of whom she spoke. But the force of love customarily brings it about that a heart believes everyone else is aware of the one of whom it is always thinking. It is understandable that the woman did not say whom she was seeking, and yet said, *'If you have taken*

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[21] Gn 46:27

him away'. She did not believe that the one for whom she herself so constantly wept in her desire was unknown to the other.

Jesus said to her: 'Mary'. After he had called her by the common name of 'woman', he called her by her own name, as if to say, 'Recognize him who recognizes you'. To a perfect man also it was said, *I know you by name,*[22] because 'man' is the common appellation of us all, but Moses was his own name. He was rightly told that he was known by name, as if the Lord was saying to him openly: 'I do not know you in a general way as I know others, but particularly.' And so because Mary was called by name, she acknowledged her Creator, and called him at once *'rabboni'*, that is, *'teacher'*. He was both the one she was outwardly seeking and the one who was teaching her inwardly to seek him.

Now the evangelist does not add what the woman did, but he implies it by what she heard. He said to her: *'Do not touch me, for I have not yet ascended to my Father.'* These words show us that Mary wished to embrace the feet of him she recognized. Her teacher did not tell her, *'Do not touch me'*, because the Lord refused the touch of women after his resurrection. It is said of the two women at his sepulchre, *They drew near and took hold of his feet.*[23]

The reason he wasn't to be touched was added in the following words: *'For I have not yet ascended to my Father.'* In our hearts, Jesus ascends to the Father when he is to be the Father's equal. In the heart of one who does not believe that he is equal to the Father, the Lord has still not ascended to his Father. That one truly touches Jesus who believes that he is coeternal with the Father. In Paul's heart Jesus had already ascended to the Father, when he said: *Though he was in the form of God, he did not think that the fact of his being equal to God was robbery.*[24] John also touched our Redeemer with the hand of faith when he said: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word*

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[22] Ex 33:12 [23] Mt 28:9 [24] Ph 2:6

was God;[25] *all things were made through him.*[26] And so that person touches the Lord who believes that he is equal to the Father in substance from eternity.

But someone may wonder how the Son can be the Father's equal. In this matter human nature is unable to comprehend what fills it with wonder. Nevertheless he can believe this, since he knows other things because of the wonder they bring about in him. There is at hand an answer to the question that he may come to briefly on his own. It is clear that the Lord himself created the mother in whose virgin womb he was created as a human being. Why then should we wonder if he is equal to the Father, when he existed before his mother? We have also learned from Paul that *Christ is the power and wisdom of God.*[27] Therefore anyone who considers the Son less than the Father particularly diminishes him when he professes that his wisdom is unequal to the Father's. What powerful person would take it calmly if someone should say to him, 'Indeed you are important, but your wisdom is less than you are'? The Lord himself said: *The Father and I are one;*[28] and again: *The Father is greater than I.*[29] It is also written that he was subject to his parents.[30] Why should we wonder if he declared that in his human nature he was less than the Father in heaven, when because of it he was subject even to his parents on earth?

In this human nature he now says to Mary: *'Go to my brothers and say to them, "I ascend to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." '* Since he said 'my' and 'your', why didn't he use the general word 'our'? But in speaking thus distinctly he indicated that he has the same Father who is such by nature, *'and your Father'*, who is such by grace; *'to my God'*, because I descended, *'and to your God'*, because you have ascended. Because I too am a human being he is my God; because you have been freed from error he is your God. He is my Father and God in a distinctive way, because he begot me as God before the ages but created me as a human being at the end of the ages.

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[25] Jn 1:1
[26] Jn 1:3
[27] 1 Co 1:24
[28] Jn 10:30
[29] Jn 14:28
[30] Lk 2:51

Mary Magdalene came and made known to his disciples, 'I have seen the Lord, and he said these things to me.' See, how the sin of the human race was removed where it began. In paradise a woman was the cause of death for a man;[31] coming from the sepulchre a woman proclaimed life to men. Mary related the words of the one who restored her to life; Eve had related the words of the serpent who brought death. It is as if the Lord was telling the human race, not by words but by actions, 'Receive the draught of life from the hand of the one who offered you the drink of death.'

I have completed this concise explanation of the Gospel lesson. Now with the assistance of this same Lord of whom I have been speaking let us reflect on the glory of his resurrection and the depth of his kindness. He willed to rise quickly from death lest our souls remain for a long time in the death of unbelief. Hence it was aptly said by the psalmist: *He drank from the stream on his journey; therefore he lifted up his head.*[32] The stream of death had been flowing in the human race from the very beginning of the world. The Lord drank from this stream on his journey, because he tasted death in his passing; and therefore he lifted up his head, because by rising he lifted up above the angels what by dying he laid in the sepulchre. He overthrew the ancient enemy forever by allowing his persecutors' hands to prevail over his body for a brief time.

The Lord revealed this clearly to blessed Job when he said: *Will you catch leviathan*[6*] with a fishhook?[33] Leviathan, which means 'their increment',[7*] designates that fish-like destroyer of the human race which, when he promised to bestow divinity upon human beings, took away their immortality. He was the cause, in the first human being, of the sin of collusion; when by his evil persuasive powers he increases many times over the sins of those who come after, he heaps

[31] Gn 3:6 [32] Ps 110:7 (V 109:7) [33] Jb 41:1 (V 40:20)

up punishment for them without end. On a fishhook, the food is evident, the barb is concealed. The all-powerful Father caught this fish-like creature by means of a fishhook, because he sent his only-begotten Son, who had become a human being, to his death. The Son had both a visible body which could suffer, and an invisible nature which could not. When, through the actions of his persecutors the serpent bit the food of his body, the barb of his divine nature pierced him. Earlier, indeed, he had recognized that he was God by his miracles, but he fell to doubting when he saw that he was capable of suffering. It is, then, as if the fishhook got caught in his throat as he was swallowing. The food of the Lord's body, which the destroyer craved, was visible on it; at the time of his passion his divine nature, which the destroyer would do away with, lay hidden. He was caught by the fishhook of the Lord's incarnation because while he was craving the food of his body, he was pierced by the barb of his divine nature. There was in the Lord a human nature which would lead the destroyer to him, and there was a divine nature which would pierce him; there was in him the obvious weakness which would entice him, and there was the hidden power which would pierce the throat of the one who seized him. Therefore was the destroyer caught by a fishhook, because the cause of his destruction was where he bit. And he lost the mortal human beings whom he rightfully held because he dared to crave the death of one who was immortal, over whom he had no claim.

Thus it is that this Mary, of whom I was speaking, was alive, because he who owed nothing to death died on behalf of the human race; thus it is that we ourselves daily return to life after we sin, because our Creator, who was sinless, came down to suffer our punishment. See how the ancient enemy lost those spoils he had taken from the human race, how he destroyed the victory he had won by deception. Daily do sinners return to life, daily are they snatched from his throat by our Redeemer's hand.

How fitting are these further words of our Lord to blessed Job: *Who will pierce its jaw with a band?*[34] A band constricts by its binding force. What does the band signify then but the divine mercy which embraces us. It pierces the jaw of leviathan when it shows that we still have the remedy of repentance after we have committed what is forbidden. The Lord pierces the jaw of leviathan with a band because he so counteracts the cunning of our ancient enemy with the indescribable power of his mercy, that sometimes our enemy even loses those he has already caught. It's as if they fall out of its mouth, when they return to a state of innocence after having sinned. Who would escape its jaw having once been seized, if it were not pierced? Did it not hold Peter in its mouth when he made his denial?[35] Did it not hold David in its mouth when it pulled him down into such a great whirlpool of dissipation?[36] But when both returned to life by repentance, it is as if leviathan lost them in some way by the breaching of its jaw. And so these men , who returned by repentance after having committed such great wickedness were rescued from its mouth by the breaching of its jaw.

Is there any human being who escapes leviathan's mouth so that he avoids all forbidden actions? By this we recognize what great debtors we are to the Redeemer of the human race, who not only forbade us to enter leviathan's mouth, but also allowed us to return from its mouth. He did not take away the sinner's hope, but he pierced its jaw to give a way of escape, so that a person who was heedlessly unwilling to guard against being bitten in the first place might at least get away afterwards. Divine Medicine meets us at every turn: it gave us human beings commandments so that we might not sin, and gave us sinners a remedy to keep us from despair. Hence we must take every precaution against being seized by leviathan's mouth when we take pleasure in sin. But then, if any of us is seized, let him not despair, because if he has perfect sorrow for his sin, he finds a breach in its jaw through which he may escape.

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[34] Jb 41:2 (V 40:21) [35] Mt 26:70 [36] 2 S 11:4 (V 2K 11:4)

This very Mary[8*] of whom I have been speaking, is here as a witness of the divine mercy. When the Pharisee wanted to stifle the spring of her devotion he said: *If this man were a prophet, he would surely know who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, that she is a sinner.*[37]But she had abandoned her wicked ways, and she washed away the stains of heart and body with her tears, and touched the feet of her Redeemer. She sat at the feet of Jesus, and listened to the words of his mouth. She had clung to him when he was alive, and she sought him when he was dead. She found alive the one she had sought when he was dead; and she found such a position of grace with him that it was she who brought the message to his apostles, who were themselves his messengers.

What ought we to see in this, my friends, except the boundless mercy of our Creator. He has put before us, as if for signs and examples of repentance, those he brought to life through repentance after a fall. I look at Peter, at the thief, at Zaccheus, at Mary and I see in them nothing else but examples put before our eyes of hope and repentance. Perhaps someone has fallen away from the faith: let him look on Peter, who wept bitterly for his fainthearted denial.[38] Perhaps someone else has been enflamed with malice and cruelty against his neighbor: let him look on the thief, who even at the moment of death attained the reward of life by repenting.[39] Perhaps another, enflamed by avarice, has plundered a stranger's goods: let him look at Zaccheus, who if he had stolen anything from anyone restored it fourfold.[40] Perhaps another yet, being enkindled with the fire of lust, has lost the purity of his body: let him look on Mary, who purged away the love of her body by the fire of divine love.[41]

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37. Lk 7:39
38. Mt 26:75
39. Lk 23:43
40. Lk 19:8
41. Lk 7:47

See how almighty God puts before our eyes at every turn those whom we ought to imitate; he provides at every turn examples of his mercy. Let us find evils distasteful, even if we have experienced them. Almighty God freely forgets that we have been guilty; he is ready to count our repentance as innocence. If we have become dirtied after the water of salvation, let us be born again from our tears. Accordingly we must listen to the voice of our first pastor: *Like newborn children, desire milk.*[42] Return, little children, to the bosom of your mother, the eternal wisdom. Drink from the bountiful breasts of the loving kindness of God. Weep for your past misdeeds shun those that avoid what lies ahead. Our Redeemer will solace our fleeting sorrows with eternal joy, he who lives and reigns with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.

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[42] 1 P 2:2

NOTES

1. Homily 25 in Migne (*PL* 1189). This particular pericope is the one designated by both Bu and W as the Gospel to be read on the Thursday after Easter.
2. This entire paragraph is to be found used by Bede in his *Commentary on the Song of Songs* (*CC* 119B: 364, 188/206).
3. Eight additional sentences adopted by Bede for his *Commentary on the Song of Songs* (*CC* 119B: 371, 463/72).
4. The Latin word translated 'expiation' is *propitiatio*. Gregory was evidently connecting it with the word used in the Latin version of the book of Exodus for 'mercy seat', viz., *propitiatorium*. The true meaning of this latter word in Hebrew, Greek or Latin is uncertain at best. It was the place above the ark of the covenant containing the two tablets of the law, from which God was pleased to communicate with his people.
5. This idea was borrowed by Bede in his *Explanation of the Acts of the Apostles* (*CC* 121: 34, 30/35) as well as in his *Homily* I, 8 (*CC* 122: 58, 224/27) and his *Commentary on Luke* (*CC* 120: 130, 1209 - 131, 1211).
6. The sea creature spoken of in the book of Job is generally considered to be a crocodile, symbolizing the devil.
7. This interpretation of the meaning of 'leviathan' is taken by Gregory from Saint Jerome's *Interpretation of Hebrew Names* (*CC* 72: 133, 25).
8. Contemporary exegetes no longer identify Mary of Magdala (Luke 8:2 and John 20:1-2, 11-18) with the sinful woman (Luke 7:36-50) and Mary, the sister of Martha (Luke 10:39 ; John 11:1,2,5 and 12:2-3).

homily 26

Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were closed where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst, and said to them, 'Peace be with you'. And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Then Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, I also send you.' When he had said this, he breathed on them and said: 'Receive the Holy Spirit. The sins of those whom you forgive are forgiven, and of those from whom you withhold forgiveness, they are not forgiven.' But Thomas, one of the twelve, who was called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. And the other disciples therefore said to him, 'We have seen the Lord'. But he said to them, 'Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails and put my finger into the print of the nails and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe'. And after eight days, his disciples were again inside and Thomas with them. Then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in their midst and said, 'Peace be with you'. Then he said to Thomas, 'Reach out your finger and behold my hand, and reach out your hand and thrust it into my side. And be not faithless but believing'. Then Thomas answered and said to him, 'My Lord and my God'. Jesus said to him: 'Because you have seen me you have believed. Blessed are they who have not seen and have believed.'

(John 20:19–29)[1]

The first question for this reading of the Gospel to strike the mind is how the Lord's body, which could come in to the disciples through closed doors after the resurrection, was a real one. But we must be certain that if a divine work is understood by reason it is not wonderful, nor does our faith have any merit when human reason provides a proof. We have to consider these works of our Redeemer, which can in no way be understood of themselves , in the light of other works of his, so that his more miraculous deeds may provoke faith in the miraculous.

The Lord's body which made its entrance to the disciples through closed doors was the same as that which issued before the eyes of men from the Virgin's closed womb at his birth. Is it surprising if he who was now going to live for ever made his entrance through closed doors after his resurrection, who on his coming in order to die made his appearance from the unopened womb of a virgin? But because the faith of those who beheld it wavered concerning the body they could see, he showed them at once his hands and his side offering them the body which he brought in through the closed doors to touch. By this action he revealed two wonderful, and according to human reason quite contradictory, things. He showed them that after his resurrection his body was both incorruptible and yet could be touched. It cannot be otherwise then that what is touched is corruptible, and what is not corruptible cannot be touched. But in a wonderful and incomprehensible way our Redeemer, after his resurrection, manifested a body that was incorruptible and touchable. By showing us that it is incorruptible he would urge us on toward our reward, and by offering it as touchable he would dispose us towards faith. He manifested himself as both incorruptible and touchable to truly show us that his body after his resurrection was of the same nature as ours but of a different sort of glory.

He said to them: 'Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, I also send you.' The Father sent his Son, appointing him to become a human person for the redemption of the human race. He willed him to come into the world to suffer—and yet he loved his Son whom he sent to suffer. The Lord is sending his chosen apostles into the world, not to the world's joys, but to suffer as he himself was sent. Therefore as the Son is loved by the Father and yet is sent to suffer, so also the disciples are loved by the Lord, who nevertheless sends them into the world to suffer. Therefore is it said, *'As the Father sent me, I also send you':* that is, when I send you out amid the scandals of your persecutors, I am loving you with that love with which the Father loved me, whom he sent into the world to undergo sufferings.

We can also understand his being sent in terms of his divine nature. The Son is said to be sent from the Father from the fact that he is begotten by the Father. The Son relates that he sends the Holy Spirit, which, although coequal with the Father and the Son, yet did not become a human being, saying: *When the Paraclete comes, whom I am sending to you from the Father.*[1] If being sent had to be understood only in the sense of becoming a human being, the Holy Spirit could in no way be called 'sent', since the Spirit did not become a human being. The sending of the Spirit is that procession by which it proceeds from the Father and the Son. Accordingly, as the Spirit is said to be sent because it proceeds, so too it is not inappropriate to say that the Son is sent because he is begotten.

When he had said this, he breathed on them and said: 'Receive the Holy Spirit.' We must ask why our Lord gave the Holy Spirit a first time while he was abiding on earth, and once again when he was presiding in heaven.[2] Nowhere is the Holy Spirit clearly shown to have been given except here when it was received through breathing, and afterwards when it is described as coming from heaven in manifold tongues. Why was it first given to the disciples on earth, and later sent from heaven, except that there are two precepts of love: of God and of neighbor?[3] The gift of the Spirit on earth was to bring about love of neighbor, and the gift from heaven was to bring about love of God. Just as there is one love and two precepts, so there is one Spirit and two gifts. The first gift was made by the Lord when he was abiding on earth and the second from heaven, because in love of our neighbor we learn how we are to arrive at the love of God. Hence this same John asked: *How can one who does not love his brother whom he sees, love God whom he does not see?*[4]

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[1] Jn 15:26 [2] Ac 2:2–4 [3] Mt 22:37–39

And indeed the same Holy Spirit was present in the hearts of the disciples earlier to give them faith, but wasn't yet given by a clear bestowal until after the resurrection. So it is also written that *The Spirit had not yet been given, because Jesus had not yet been glorified.*[5] And it was said by Moses: *They drew honey from the rock, and oil from the hardest rock.*[6] Historically we read nothing of this sort throughout the entire text of the Old Testament; nowhere did that people draw honey or oil from rock. But because according to Paul, *The rock was Christ,*[7] they drew honey from the rock who saw the deeds and miracles of our Redeemer; and they drew oil from the hard rock because they were found worthy to be anointed with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit after his resurrection. We might say that soft rock gave honey to the Lord, while he was still alive, showed his disciples the sweetness of his miracles; and hard rock poured forth oil because after his resurrection, when he had now become incapable of suffering, the gift of the holy anointing flowed out of him through the breathing forth of the Spirit. Of this oil the prophet said: *The yoke will decay at the appearance of the oil.*[8] We were being held under the yoke of the devil's control, but we were anointed by the oil of the Holy Spirit. And because he anointed us with the grace of freedom, the yoke of the devil's control decayed, as Paul testified: *Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.*[9]

We must be sure that those who already had the Holy Spirit so that they might themselves live blameless lives, and by their preaching be of assistance to others, received it openly after the Lord's resurrection so that they could be of assistance not just to a few but to many. Hence it is further said in this bestowal of the Spirit: *'The sins of those whom you forgive are forgiven, and of those from whom you withhold forgiveness, they are not forgiven.'* It is pleasant to observe the disciples, lifted up to a height of glory equal to the burden of humility to which they were called. You see how they not only acquire peace of mind concerning themselves, but even receive the power of releasing others from their bonds. They share in the right of divine judgment so that as God's vicars they may withhold forgiveness of sins from some and grant it to others. So it was fitting that only those who had consented to be humbled for the sake of God be raised up by him. Those who feared God's strict judgment were made judges of hearts; those who were themselves fearful of being condemned condemn some and set others free. Their place in the Church is now held by the bishops. Those who obtain the position of governing receive authority to loose and to bind. It is a great honor, but the burden is heavy. In truth it is difficult for one who does not know how to exercise control over his own life to become the judge of someone else's life. And it often happens that someone whose life is hardly in accord with his position holds this place of judgment; it frequently comes about that either he condemns those who do not deserve to be condemned, or he looses others who are bound. Often in loosing and binding those subject to him he follows the inclination of his own will and not the merits of the case. Hence it happens that one who exercises this power according to his own inclination and not according to the character of those subject to him deprives himself of this very power of binding and loosing. It frequently happens that a pastor is moved by hatred or favor towards some neighbor. Those who allow hatred or favor to influence them are unable to make worthy judgments in the case of those under their authority.

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[4] 1 Jn 4:20
[5] Jn 7:39
[6] Dt 32:13
[7] 1 Co 10:4
[8] Is 10:27
[9] 2 Co 3:17

The prophet has rightly said that *they were putting to death souls which were not dying, and bringing back to life souls which were not living.*[10] Anyone who condemns a righteous person is putting to death one who is not dying; and one who tries to absolve a guilty person from his punishment is striving to bring back to life one who is not living. All cases must be carefully considered, and only then the power of binding and loosing used. The pastor must look at the sin, and the repentance following after the sin, so that his sentence absolves those to whom almighty God grants the grace of sorrow. There is true absolution on the part of the one presiding only when it is in accord with the decision of the internal judge.

The raising of a man who had been four days dead well illustrates this. It shows the Lord first calling forth the dead man and restoring him to life, saying, *Lazarus, come forth;*[11] and then the one who had come forth living was loosed by the disciples. It is written that *when he who had been bound with swathing-bands had come forth* Jesus said to his disciples, *Loose him and let him go.*[12] The disciples loosed one now living, whom the master had raised when he was dead. If the disciples were to loose Lazarus when he was dead, they would display a foul odor rather than his power.

This example makes clear that we must loose by our pastoral authority those whom we perceive that our Creator is bringing back to life by his awakening grace. Certainly this restoration to life is already evident in the confession of the sin, preceding the performance of any good work. Hence Lazarus, the dead man, was not told: 'Return to life', but, *Come forth.* It is true of every sinner that when he hides his sin within his conscience, it lies concealed within, secreted in his heart. The dead man comes forth when the sinner voluntarily confesses his acts of wickedness. The Lord told Lazarus, *Come forth,* as if he were telling everyone dead in sin, 'Why are you hiding your guilt within your conscience? Come forth now by confession, you who are lying concealed within yourself by your act of denial.' Let the dead person come forth, then; let the sinner confess his sin. And let the disciples loose this one who comes forth; the pastors of the Church must take away the punishment he deserved from one who was not ashamed to confess what he had done.

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[10] Ezk 13:19 [11] Jn 11:43 [12] Jn 11:44

I have spoken briefly about the proper manner of loosing, so that the Church's pastors may be diligent, using great care in loosing and binding. But whether a pastor lays an obligation on someone rightly or wrongly, yet his decision should be feared by his flock. Otherwise his subject, who perhaps has been wrongly bound, may come to deserve the sentence by which he is bound through committing another sin. Let the pastor, then, fear either to absolve or to bind unwisely; but let the one who is under his authority fear to be bound even wrongly. Let him not blame his pastor's judgment rashly. Even though he has been bound wrongly, there may arise from his proud, self-righteous criticism a sin that did not exist previously. Since I have spoken about this briefly in order to elucidate it, let me now return to the course of my explanation.

But Thomas, one of the twelve, who was called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. This one disciple was absent. When he returned and heard what had happened, he refused to believe what he heard. The Lord came again and offered his side to the unbelieving disciple to be touched. He showed his hands; and by showing the scars of his wounds he cured the wound of his unbelief. What, dearly beloved, do you notice in all this? Do you believe that it was by chance that this chosen disciple was absent then? And that on coming later he heard, that on hearing he doubted, that after doubting he touched Jesus, and after touching him he believed? This did not happen by chance, but by divine providence. Divine compassion brought it about in a wonderful way that when the doubting disciple touched the wounds in his master's body, he cured the wounds of our unbelief. Thomas' unbelief was of more advantage to our faith than the faith of the believing disciples, because when he was led back to faith by touching Jesus, our minds were relieved of all doubt and made firm in faith. And so after his resurrection Jesus allowed his disciples to doubt. But he did not desert him in his doubt. It is much the same as when before his birth he desired that Mary have a husband, who had not yet married her. The disciple who doubted and touched became a witness to the truth of the resurrection in just the same way as the husband of his mother had been the guardian of her perfect virginity.

Thomas touched him and cried aloud: *'My Lord and my God.' Jesus said to him: 'Because you have seen me, you have believed.'* When the apostle Paul says[2*] that *faith is the ground of things to be hoped for, the proof of things that are not evident,*[13] it is clear that faith is the proof of those things which cannot be made evident: things that are evident no longer involve faith but recognition. Why then, when Thomas saw, when he touched, was it said to him: *'Because you have seen me, you have believed'?* He saw one thing, and he believed another. Divinity could not be seen by a mortal person. He saw a human being, and he confessed him as God, saying: *'My Lord and my God.'* Seeing he believed. He apprehended a mere man, and testified that this was the invisible God.

We rejoice greatly at what follows: *'Blessed are they who have not seen and have believed.'* Certainly this saying refers to us who keep in our minds one whom we do not see in his body. It refers to us, but only if we follow up our faith with our works. That person truly believes who expresses his belief in his works. Paul says of those others who retain the faith only in name: *They profess that they know God, but deny him by their deeds.*[14] James says of them that *Faith without works is dead.*[15] And the Lord said to Job, of the ancient enemy of our human race: *He will swallow up a river and will not wonder, and he is confident that the Jordan will stream*

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[13] Heb 11:1 [14] Tt 1:16 [15] Jm 2:26

into his mouth.[16] What does the river indicate but the forward movement of the human race? The human race moves forward like a stream, from its beginning to its end, and like water it moves to its due completion, with human beings as its substance, so to speak. What is the Jordan River but an image of the baptized? Since the Author of our redemption himself deigned to be baptized in the river Jordan,[17] it is appropriate that the name Jordan represent the multitude of those who have received the sacrament of baptism. The human race's ancient enemy swallowed up a river, because from the creation of the world up to our Redeemer's coming, he drew the human race into the belly of his wickedness, with only a few of the elect escaping him. It is said of him that *He will swallow up a river and will not wonder,* because he does not count it a great thing when he seizes unbelievers. But what follows is very grave: *He is confident that the Jordan will stream into his mouth.* After seizing so many unbelievers, since the beginning of the world, he trusts that he can scoop up believers also. Daily he gulps down, with the mouth of his baleful persuasion, those whose blameworthy lives are at variance with their profession of faith.

Therefore, dearly beloved, turn your whole mind to fearing this. Ponder it with an anxious mind. We have completed the paschal solemnities, but we must live so as to be found worthy to read the eternal feast. Every feast celebrated in time passes away. You who are present at these solemnities must take care not to be cut off from the eternal solemnities. What advantage is it for you to be present at human festivals if it comes about that you are absent from the festivals of the angels? This present solemnity is a shadow of the solemnity to come. We celebrate it each year so that we may be brought to that one which is not celebrated yearly but continually. When it is carried out at the appointed time, it refreshes our memories with desire for the one to come. By our attendance on this occasion of temporal joy we must allow our hearts to ignite and burn for eternal joys. Then our hearts enjoy perfectly, with true happiness, in our homeland, what they contemplate in the shadow of that joy on their way there.

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[16] Jb 40:23 (V 40:18)

[17] Mt 3:13

Set your lives and practices in order, my friends. Consider how he who rose in meekness from the dead will come with great strictness at the judgment. Do not doubt that He will appear on the day of his dreadful examination with his angels, archangels, thrones, dominations, principalities and powers, with heaven and earth ablaze, and all the elements shaking with terror in submission to him. Keep this judge, who is the cause of such alarm, before your eyes. Fear him who is to come, so that when he comes you may not regard him with dread but with confidence. He must be feared, then, in order that he may not be feared. Let dread of him be for us a motive for good works, let awe of him restrain us from a wicked way of life. Believe me, my friends, we shall be more confident in his presence the more we try now to be aware of our sins.

If any one of you had to show himself tomorrow in court to plead his case with an opponent, and I were to be the judge, I am certain that you would probably spend the whole night without sleep, turning over in your mind alertly and anxiously what might be said to you and what you might answer to the charges, lest you be greatly in awe of me and find me harsh. And who and what am I? Truly I am not far from being a worm, after having been a human being, and after having been a worm, dust. If you dread the judgment of dust with so much solicitude, with what attention, with what dread must we ponder and prepare for the judgment of such greater majesty?

But there are some who are uncertain about the resurrection of the body. I teach all the more effectively if I face up to the hidden questions of your hearts, and so I must speak a few words about faith in the resurrection. There are many, like myself at one time, who fear that body and bones are not restored from dust. When they see a body reduced to decay, and bones to dust, by burial, they say as if speaking to themselves, 'When is a person brought back from dust, when does it happen that ashes are restored to life?'

I answer briefly that it is far less for God to restore what once existed than to create what did not. Why is it astonishing if one who created all things from nothing in a moment recreates a human being from dust? It is more astonishing that he created heaven and earth out of nothingness than for him to restore a human being from the earth. But they notice the ashes of a corpse, and despair of its being able to return a living body. They are seeking to grasp the power of divine actions by their mind, so to speak. They express these things in their thoughts for this reason, that God's daily miracles have become commonplace through their constant repetition. The entire mass of a tree that is going to be born lies hidden within one grain of very small seed.[3]* Let us place before our eyes the marvelous size of some tree; let us ponder whence it started to grow into so great a mass: surely we shall find that its beginning was a very small seed. Let us now consider how the strength of the wood, the roughness of the bark, the amount of taste and smell, the abundance of fruits and the greenness of the leaves lie hidden in that small grain of seed. When we touch the grain of seed, it is not strong: where does the hardness of its wood come from? It is not rough: where has the roughness of the bark arisen? It has no taste: where has the taste of the fruit come from? It gives forth no odor: whence does the odor of the fruit arise? It gives no indication of being green: what does the greenness of the leaves come out of? All these things lie hidden together in the seed, but they don't all emerge at once. A root is produced from the seed, a shoot from the root, fruit from the shoot; and a seed is produced in the fruit. Let us say, then, that the seed lies hidden within the seed. Why then is it therefore wonderful if he who daily restores from a small seed the wood, fruit and leaves in the great mass of a tree, produces bones, nerves, flesh and hair from dust?

When our minds have doubts concerning the power of the resurrection, and seek reasons for these things, questions necessarily come to it. They are ceaselessly arising, but still we cannot grasp them by reason. When our minds cannot probe what they behold by sight of the thing, they may believe what they hear concerning the promise of divine power. Dearly beloved, think about these promises. Despise things that pass away with time as if they were already gone. Apply all your attention to hastening of the resurrection, which Truth has shown us in himself. Flee the earthly desires which separate us from our Creator, because you will penetrate more deeply into the vision of the omnipotent God the more perfectly you love *the Mediator between God and man,*[18] who lives and reigns with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.

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[18] 1 Tm 2:5

NOTES

1. Homily 26 in Migne (*PL* 1197). In the margin of Gospel book W this pericope is marked as the passage to be read at the Saturday vigil mass of the octave Sunday of Easter, while N has a note at Jn 20:26 for this to be read on the octave Sunday of Easter, and Bu, like W, has the designation of Jn 20:19 as the Gospel for the octave Sunday of Easter and Jn 20:24 as the passage to be read at the Saturday vigil mass of the octave of Easter Sunday.
2. Bede had no reason to doubt that St Paul had written the Letter to the Hebrews.
3. This idea, in almost identical words, is to be found in Saint Augustine's *Commentary on John's Gospel* 24:1 (*CC* 36: 244, 4/7).

homily 27

> *This is my commandment, that you love one another just as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, than that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends, if you do whatever I command you. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because everything I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you and appointed you to go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should endure, that whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will grant you.*
>
> (John 15:12–16)[1]*

Since all of our Lord's sacred utterances contain commandments, why does he say about love as if it were a special commandment: *This is my commandment, that you love one another?* It is because every commandment is about love, and they all add up to one commandment because whatever is commanded is founded on love alone. As a tree's many branches come from one root, so do many virtues come forth from love alone. The branch which is our good works has no sap unless it remains attached to the root of love. Our Lord's commandments are then both many and one: many through the variety of the works, one in their root which is love. He himself instructs us to love our friends in him, and our enemies for his sake. That person truly possesses love who loves his friend in God and his enemy for God's sake.

There are some people who love their neighbors, drawn by blood relationship or by natural affection, and Scripture does not oppose this kind of love. But what we give freely and naturally is one thing, and the obedience we owe to the Lord's commandments out of love is another. Those I've mentioned indisputably love their neighbors, yet they don't attain love's sublime rewards since their love does not come from spiritual but from natural motives.

Therefore when the Lord said: *This is my commandment, that you love one another,* he added immediately: *Just as I have loved you,* meaning, 'You must love for the same reason that I have loved you.' Dearly beloved, we must consider this carefully. When our ancient enemy draws our hearts to delight in temporal things, he is stirring up a weaker neighbor against us. This neighbor may be plotting to take away the very things we love. In doing this our ancient enemy is not concerned to do away with our earthly possessions; he wants to destroy our lives. Suddenly we are set on fire with hatred, and while we desire to be outwardly unconquerable, inwardly we are gravely wounded. When we defend our small outer possession, we lose our great inner one, since when we love something temporal we lose our true love. Everyone who takes away our possessions is an enemy. But if we begin to hate our enemy, our loss is of something internal. When then we suffer something external from a neighbor, we must be on our guard against a hidden ravager within. This one is never better overcome than when we love the one who ravages us from without. The unique, the highest proof of love is this, to love the person who is against us. This is why Truth himself bore the suffering of the cross and yet bestowed his love on his persecutors, saying: *Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.*[1]

Why should we wonder that his living disciples loved their enemies, when their dying master loved his. He expressed the depth of his love when he said: *No one has greater love than this, than that he lay down his life for his friends.* The Lord had come to die even for his enemies, and yet he said he would lay down his life for his friends to show us that when we are able to win over our enemies by loving them even our persecutors are our friends.

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[1] Lk 23:34

But no one is persecuting us to the point of death. How then can we prove that we love our friends? But there is something we should do during times of peace in the Church to make clear whether we are strong enough to die for the sake of loving during times of persecution. John, the author of this gospel, says: *He who has this world's goods and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does God's love dwell in him?*[2] And John the Baptist says: *Let him who has two tunics give to him who has none.*[3] Will a person, then, who will not give up his tunic for the sake of God during quiet times give up his life during a persecution? Cultivate the virtue of love in tranquil times by showing mercy, then, so what it will be unconquerable in times of disorder. Learn first to give up your possessions for almighty God, and then yourself.

You are my friends. How great is our Creator's mercy! We were unworthy servants, and he calls us friends. How great is our human value, that we should be friends of God!

You've heard your glorious dignity—now listen to what the struggle costs. *If you do whatever I command you.* You are my friends, if you do whatever I command you. When the sons of Zebedee, through their mother, asked that one should sit at God's right hand and the other at his left, they heard him say: *Can you drink the cup that I am going to drink?*[4] They were seeking a place of eminence. Truth called them back to the way by which they could come to it, as if he were saying: 'This place of eminence delights you now, but first you must follow the way of suffering. The cup is the way to greatness. If your heart is seeking what allures it, first drink what causes it pain. Only through the bitter drink which is prepared for it does it reach the joy of salvation.

I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because everything I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. What are all these things he has heard from his Father, which he willed to make known to his servants in order to make them his friends? Are they not the joys of spiritual love? Are they not the festivals of our heavenly home which he daily impresses on our hearts by his inspiring love? When we love the supercelestial things we have heard about, we already know the things we love, because love itself is knowledge. He had made everything known to them, then. Transformed from their earthly desires, they were burning with flames of the supreme love.

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[2] 1 Jn 3:17 [3] Lk 3:11 [4] Mt 20:22

The prophet had seen people who were truly God's friends when he said: *Your friends, O God, have become exceedingly honorable to me!*[5] A friend can be called a kind of soul-keeper. Since the psalmist looked forward to seeing God's chosen ones separated from love of this world, and keeping his will by observing the divine mandates, he marveled at God's friends, saying: *Your friends, O God, have become exceedingly honorable to me!* And as if we were immediately seeking to learn the reasons for such great honor he adds: *Their pre-eminence has been exceedingly strengthened.*[6] We see God's elect subduing their bodies, strengthening their spirits, commanding demons, shining with virtues, despising things of this present life, preaching our eternal homeland by voice and character, loving it even when they are dying and attaining it by their sufferings. They can be killed but never turned away from it. This is why their pre-eminence has been exceedingly strengthened.

See in the suffering by which they died physically their loftiness of mind. How did this come about except that their pre-eminence was strengthened. But perhaps these great ones are few in number? The psalmist added: *I shall count them, and they shall be multiplied beyond the grains of sand.*[7] Consider the whole world, my friends. It is filled with martyrs. We who look upon them are not nearly as numerous as those witnesses to the Truth. God has counted them, and they have been multiplied for us beyond the grains of sand, they whose number we are unable to grasp.

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[5] Ps 139:17 (V 138:17)

[6] Ps 139:17 (V 138:17)

[7] Ps 139:18 (V 138:18)

But let one who has attained the dignity of being called a friend of God observe that the gifts he perceives in himself are beyond him; let him attribute nothing to his own merits so that he become an enemy. The Lord adds: *You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you and appointed you to go and bring forth fruit.* 'I have appointed you for grace. I have planted you to go willingly and bring forth fruit by your works. I have said that you should go willingly, since to will to do something is already to go in your heart.' Then he adds the quality their fruit is to have: *And your fruit is to endure.* Everything we labor for in this present world scarcely lasts until death. Death intervenes and cuts off the fruit of our labor. But what we do for eternal life remains even after death; it begins to appear only when the fruits of our physical labors cease to be visible. The recompense of the one begins when the other is ended. Let one who recognizes that he now bears eternal fruit within his soul think little of the temporal fruits of his labors. Let us work for the fruit that endures, let us work for the fruit that begins at death since death destroys all others. The prophet testified that the fruits of God begin at death when he said: *He gives to his beloved sleep; this is the inheritance of the Lord.*[8] Everyone who sleeps in death loses his inheritance. But when he gives to his beloved sleep, this is the inheritance of the Lord, because God's elect find their inheritance after they have reached death.

He continues, *that whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will grant you.* Here he says, *Whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will grant you,* and in another place the same evangelist has him saying, *If you ask anything of the Father in my name he will give it to you. Up to now you have asked nothing in my name.*[9] If the Father gives us everything we ask in the name of his Son why is it that Paul [2*] three times besought the Lord and did not merit to be heard, but was told: *My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in*

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[9] Jn 16:23–24

weakness.[10] Did the great preacher not ask in the name of the Son? Then why didn't he receive what he asked? How is it true that whatever we ask in the Son's name he gives us if the Apostle asked in the Son's name that the angel of satan be taken from him but did not receive what he asked?

The Son's name is Jesus. Jesus means 'saviour' or 'saving'. One who asks in the Saviour's name asks what pertains to actual salvation. If what he asks for is not for his good he is not asking the Father in Jesus' name. Hence the Lord says to his apostles while they were still weak, *Up to now you have asked nothing in my name.*[11] He means, 'You who do not know how to seek eternal salvation have not asked in the Saviour's name.' That is the reason too why Paul was not heard. If he had been freed from temptation it would not been of help to his salvation.

We see, dearly beloved, how many have gathered for the martyr's feast. You bend your knees, you strike your breasts, you raise your voices in prayer and praise, you bathe your faces with your tears. But consider your requests, I beseech you, and see if you are asking in the name of Jesus, if you are asking for the joys of eternal salvation. You are not seeking Jesus in the house of Jesus if you are praying unreasonably for temporal things in the temple of eternity. One seeks in his prayer for a wife, another a country estate, another for clothing, another prays earnestly for food. We are indeed to ask these things from almighty God when we lack them. But we must constantly remember what we have received from our Redeemer's precept: *Seek first the kingdom of God and his justice, and all these things will be given you as well.*[12]

To ask these things of Jesus, then, is not to go wrong, if our requests are not excessive. What is more serious, is that one asks the death of an enemy, and pursues in his prayer one whom he cannot pursue with his sword. The one upon whom this evil is wished lives on, and yet the one who wishes him evil is held guilty of his death. God commands us to love our enemy, and yet he beseeches God to kill him. Anyone who prays in this way is fighting against his Creator in his prayers. And so it was said, as applying to Judas, *Let his prayer be counted as sin.*[13]

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[10] 2 Cor 12:9 [11] Jn 16:24 [12] Mt 6:33

Prayer is counted as sin when it is a request for things the one being asked has forbidden. So Truth tells us: *When you stand up to pray, forgive, if you have anything in your hearts.*[14] I can show this virtue of forgiveness more clearly if I bring forward an example from the Old Testament. When Judea had complained of their Creator's justice, even their sins had demanded it, the Lord forbade his prophet to pray, saying: *You shall not raise praise or prayer on their behalf;*[15] *even if Moses and Samuel were standing in my sight, my soul would not warm to this people.*[16] Why has he passed over so many fathers unnoticed, and brought forward only Moses and Samuel? Their great power to work marvels is shown when it is said that not even they are able to make intercession. The Lord means, 'I do not listen even to those whom I do not spurn owing to the great merit of their request.' Why is it that Moses and Samuel are preferred to all the other fathers in this matter of making requests if it is not that these two alone in the whole history of the Old Testament are said to have prayed earnestly even for their enemies? One of them the people attacked with stones, and yet he prayed to his Lord for those who were stoning him.[17] The other was deposed form his position of leadership, and yet when he was asked to make supplication he yielded, saying: *Far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you.*[18]

If Moses and Samuel were standing in my sight, my soul would not warm to this people. 'I do not now listen to them when they pray for their friends, even though I know that in their great virtue they pray even for their enemies.' The power of true prayer is the summit of love. Each one receives what he properly requests, when his mind is not blinded by hatred of his enemy when he makes it.

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[13] Ps 109:7 (V 108:7)
[14] Mk 11:25
[15] Jr 7:16
[16] Jr 15:1
[17] Ex 17:4
[18] 1 S 12:23

We often subdue our minds when they are reluctant, we pray for our enemies, we pour out prayers for our adversaries: would that our hearts were filled with love! We frequently offer a prayer for our enemies, but we do it because it is commanded rather than out of love. We even ask life for our enemies, and yet we're afraid that we'll be heard. But the Judge of our souls considers our hearts rather than our words. He is asking nothing for his enemy who does not pray for him out of love.

But our enemy has committed a serious offense against us. He has inflicted losses, injured those who support him, persecuted his friends. We might keep these things in mind, if we had no sins of our own to be forgiven. Our Advocate has indeed composed a prayer for our case, and in this case our Advocate is also our Judge. He has inserted a condition in the prayer which he composed: *Forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors.*[19] Since he who is our Advocate is coming also as our Judge, he who formed our prayer is listening to it. We either say the words, *Forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors,* without carrying them out, and so bind ourselves more tightly by our words; or we may perhaps omit this condition in our prayer, and our Advocate does not recognize the prayer which he composed, and immediately says to himself: 'I know what I taught them. This is not the prayer I formed for them.'

What are we to do, then, my friends? We must bestow our love on our brothers and sisters. No malice should remain in our hearts. May almighty God have regard for our love of our neighbor, so that he may pardon our iniquities. Remember what he has taught us: *Forgive, and you will be forgiven.*[20] People are in debt to us, and we to them. Let us forgive their debts, so that what we owe may be forgiven. But our hearts struggle against this. They want to fulfil what they hear, but yet they are reluctant to do so.

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[19] Mt 6:12 [20] Lk 6:37

We have gathered at this martyr's tomb. We know by what kind of death he reached the heavenly kingdom. If we do not lay down our lives for Christ, let us at least conquer our hearts. God is appeased by this sacrifice. At the time of his loving judgment he will approve the victory won through our peace. He sees the struggle going on in our hearts, and he helps those who struggle, just as he will later reward those who overcome. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.

NOTES

1. Homily 27 in Migne (*PL* 1205). In the course of the homily Gregory mentions that it is being preached on the feast day of a martyr, but there is no indication in the early Gospel books of the particular saint referred to.
2. From this point on, to the end of the paragraph, Gregory appears to have relied heavily upon both Saint Augustine's *Commentary on John's Gospel* 73, 2-3, 102, 1-2 (CC 36: 510, 14-511, 30, 594, 1 - 595, 30) and his *Commentary on the First Letter of John* 6, 6 (*PL* 35: 2022-23). In fact, almost all the material in this homily seems to have been based upon the latter work.

homily 28

So Jesus came again into Cana of Galilee where he had made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman whose son was sick at Capernaum. When he heard that Jesus was coming out of Judaea into Galilee, he went to him and asked him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. Then Jesus said to him, 'Unless you see signs and portents, you do not believe'. The nobleman said to him, 'Sir, come down before my child dies'. Jesus said to him, 'Go your way. Your son lives.' And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken to him and he went his way. And as he was going his servants met him and told him, You son lives. Then he asked them the hour when he began to mend. And they said to him, 'Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him'. So the father knew that it was at the same hour at which Jesus had said to him, Your son lives. And he and his whole house believed.

(John 4:46–53)[1]*

There is no need for me to explain the reading from the holy Gospel which you have just heard, my friends. But I am going to say something about it, more in the way of counsel than of explanation, so that I will not seem to have passed over it in silence. I see only one thing that I need to explain to you, why the one who had come for a cure heard the words: *Unless you see signs and portents, you do not believe.* The one who was seeking a cure for his son surely believed; he wouldn't be seeking a cure from one he didn't believe could do it.

Why, then, did he hear the words: *Unless you see signs and portents, you do not believe,* when he believed before he saw the sign? But recall what he was asking, and you will see that his faith was in doubt. He asked Jesus earnestly to come down and heal his son. He was asking for the physical presence of the Lord, who is nowhere absent in his spirit. He had little faith in one he thought could not heal unless he was physically present. If he had believed completely he would have known that there was no place where God was not present. He was considerably distrustful, then, since it was not the Lord's greatness he esteemed but his physical presence. He sought a cure for his son even though his faith was in doubt, since he believed that the one he had approached had the power to cure, and yet he thought he was not with his dying son. But the Lord whom he asked to come revealed that he was not absent from the place he was invited to. He who created everything by his will performed the cure by his command alone.

In this matter we must pay careful attention to what we have learned from the testimony of another evangelist. A centurion came to the Lord saying: *Sir, my son is lying at home paralyzed and in great pain.* Jesus immediately answered him: *I myself will come and heal him.*[1] Why is it that when the ruler asked him to come to his son he refused to go there in person, but he promised to go in person to the servant, when the centurion had not asked him to do so? He did not condescend to be physically present to the ruler's son, but did hurry to the side of the centurion's servant.

Why was this, except to check our pride? We do not respect in people their nature, made in God's image, but their riches and reputation. When we consider what is important about them we scarcely regard what they are within. We pay attention to what is physically displeasing about them and neglect to consider what they are. Our Redeemer, to show us that the things human beings regard highly are displeasing to the saints, and that we are not to be displeased by what humans consider displeasing, refused to go to the ruler's son but was ready to go to the centurion's servant.

He was rebuking our pride, then, which does not know how to consider human beings as such. As I said, it considers only the external aspects of people, not looking at their nature or acknowledging God's honor present in people. God's Son does not choose to go to the ruler's son, yet he is ready to come to cure a servant. Certainly, if someone's servant asked us, [saying that] we should come to him, our pride would immediately suggest to our minds, You shouldn't go because you would be lowering yourself; you would be risking your reputation and cheapen your position. You see that one came from heaven who was not reluctant to hasten to a servant on earth, and yet we who are of the earth refuse to be humbled on earth. What is of less worth in God's sight, what more displeasing to him, than for us to preserve our reputation before men and not to fear the eyes of our conscience? In the Gospel the Lord has told the Pharisees: *You are the ones who make yourselves righteous before your fellow men, but God knows your hearts; what is highly regarded by human beings is loathsome in the sight of God.*[2] See, my friend, see what he is saying. If what is highly regarded by human beings is loathsome in God's sight, the thoughts of our hearts are lower in his sight the higher the regard they receive from humans, and the humility of our hearts is more highly regarded by God the lower it is in human eyes.

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[1] Mt 8:6-7

Let us then not be pleased if we are successful in anything, let us not be proud of our activities, let our material goods and glory not exalt us. If we swell up with pride about any good things that come our way we are displeasing to God. The psalmist says of the humble: *The Lord protects the little ones.*[3] Since he was calling the humble 'little ones,' after this saying he added something else. As if we were asking him what he would do in such a case, he added: *I was made humble, and he set me free.*[4]

Think of these things, my friend. Consider them with all your attention. Do not respect this world's goods in your neighbors. For the Lord's sake honor in those who are not placed in authority over you the fact that they have been created in God's image. As far as your neighbors are concerned, you serve them truly if you are not swollen with pride in your heart beforehand. No one who still exalts himself because of things that pass away knows how to respect what is lasting in his neighbor. Do not consider what you have but what you are. The world you love is passing away.

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[2] Lk 16:15 [3] Ps 116:6 (V 114:6) [4] *ibid.*

The saints at whose tomb we have gathered trod down a flourishing world by despising it in their hearts. Life was long, good health endured, material things were in abundance, there were many offspring and tranquillity in long-lasting peace. And yet, even though the world itself was flourishing, in their hearts it had already dried up. You see now a world that has already dried up, but it is still flourishing in our hearts. Everywhere there is strife, everywhere ruin. We are struck from every side, on every side we are filled with bitterness. Yet we blindly love the bitter things brought on from our material desires, we pursue what is passing away, we cling to what is falling. And because we can't hold on to it, we too are falling along with the things we grasp as they collapse. Once the world held us by its delights. Now it is so full of disasters that the world itself is summoning us to God. Consider the emptiness of things which pass away with time. Let the end of what is temporal show that what can pass away amounts to nothing. Let the fall of things reveal their transitory nature, and that what appeared to be lasting amounts to almost nothing. Consider these things carefully, dearly beloved. Fix your hearts on love of what is eternal, so that when you decline to strive for earthly heights you may attain the glory you grasp by faith. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.

NOTES

1. Homily 28 in Migne (*PL* 1211). There is no specific designation in the early Gospel books of a particular feast day on which this passage was appointed to be read, though Gregory mentions toward the end of the homily 'those saints at whose tomb we have gathered.'

homily 29

Afterward he appeared to the eleven as they sat at supper, and upbraided them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who had seen him after he was risen. And he said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. The person who believes and is baptized shall be saved, but the person who does not believe shall be damned. These are signs that will follow those who believe: they shall cast out demons in my name, they will speak with new tongues; they shall take up snakes and if they drink a deadly thing it shall not hurt them; they shall lay their hands on the sick and they will recover.' And after the Lord Jesus had spoken to them he was taken up into heaven, and took his seat at the right hand of God. And they set out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming their message by signs that accompanied it. Amen.
(Mark 16:14–20)[1*]

That the disciples were so slow to believe[2*] in the Lord's resurrection did not come so much from their want of strength as to strengthen us in the future, if I may speak in this way. He showed them in their doubt many proofs of his resurrection. What happens to us when we read and acknowledge them is that we are strengthened as a result of their doubt. Mary Magdalene, who was quick to believe, has helped me less than Thomas, who remained so long in doubt. While doubting he touched the scars of the wounds, and cut out of our hearts the wound of doubt.

Let us see what Luke reports in order to teach us the truth of the Lord's resurrection: *While he was eating with them he told them not to depart from Jerusalem;*[1] and after a little, *As*

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[1] Ac 1:4

they were looking on he was lifted up, and a cloud took him from their sight.[2] Note the words; mark the mysteries. *While he was eating with them he was lifted up.* He ate and he ascended, so that the reality of his body might be disclosed as a result of his eating.

But Mark recalls that before he ascended into heaven the Lord rebuked his disciples for their hardness of heart and their lack of belief. What are we to think of this, except that the Lord rebuked his disciples at the time he left them physically in order to fix his parting words more firmly in the hearts of his hearers? Let us hear what he told them to do after he had rebuked their hardheartedness: *'Go into the whole world and preach the Gospel to every creature.'* Is the holy Gospel to be preached to inanimate things[3]* and to brute animals, that the disciples were told to *Preach to every creature?* But 'every creature' means human beings. Stones have being, but neither life nor feeling. Plants and trees are alive, but they have no feeling. I say that they are alive, not because they have a soul, but because they are green and Paul says of them: *O foolish person, what you sow does not come to life unless it first dies.*[3] They are alive, then, since they die in order to come to life. And so stones exist but are not alive; trees exist and are alive but have no feeling; brute animals exist, they are alive and have feeling, but they have no understanding. Finally angels exist. They are alive, possess feeling and understanding. Human beings have something in common with every creature. They share existence with stones, like trees they are alive, like animals, they feel, and like the angels, they have understanding. If human beings, then, have something in common with every creature, in some sense human beings are every creature. And so the Gospel is preached to every creature when it is preached only to human beings, since those being taught are they for whose sake all things on earth were created, and to whom all things are related by some kind of likeness.

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[2] Ac 1:9 [3] 1 Co 15:36

'Every creature' can also refer to every nation of the Gentiles.[4]* It was said earlier, *Do not go into the way of the Gentiles,*[4] but now, *'Preach to every creature,'* so that after Judea had rejected the preaching of the apostles, it might help us. Judea in its pride rejected their preaching in testimony to its own condemnation. When the Truth sent his disciples to preach, what was he doing but scattering seed throughout the world? He scattered a few grains of seed in order to receive the produce of many harvests from our faith. No such harvest of believers would have risen throughout the entire world if those chosen grains, his preachers, had not come from the Lord's hand upon an earth endowed with reason.

'One who believes and is baptized will be saved; one who does not believe will be condemned.'[5]* Perhaps each one of us may say to himself, 'I have believed, I will be saved.' What he says is true, if he possesses faith with works. That faith is true which does not contradict its words by its conduct. That is why Paul said of certain false believers: *They profess that they know God, but they deny him by their deeds;*[5] and why John said: *He who says that he knows God and does not observe his commandments is a liar.*[6] Since this is so, we must acknowledge the truth of our faith by having regard for our lives. Then we are truly believers, when we fulfill by our works what we promise by our words. On the day of our baptism we promised to renounce all the works of our ancient enemy and all his pomps. Let each one of you recall this to mind; if he is sure that he is preserving after baptism what he promised before it, let him rejoice that he is a believer. But you see how he has not preserved what he promised, how he has fallen to doing things he shouldn't do, to desiring the pomps of the world. Let us see if he can weep for his misdeeds. He will not be held dishonest in the eyes of the merciful Judge if he returns to the truth even after lying, because almighty God puts away our misdeeds in his judgment when he gladly accepts our repentance.

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[4] Mt 10:5 [5] Tt 1:16 [6] 1 Jn 2:4

'These are the signs that will follow those who will believe: they will cast out demons in my name, they will speak with new tongues, they will pick up snakes, and if they drink a deadly thing, it will not harm them; they will lay their hands on the sick who will recover.' Do you not believe,[6]* my friends, because you do not perform these signs? These things were necessary at the Church's beginning. For the faith of believers to increase it had to be nourished with miracles. When we plant trees, we water them until we see that they have taken root in the ground; once they have taken root we stop watering them. This is why Paul said: *Tongues are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers.*[7] There is something about these signs and powers we ought to consider more deeply. Holy Church does daily in a spiritual way what it did then materially through the apostles. When its priests impose their hands on believers through the gift of exorcism, and forbid the evil spirits to dwell in their hearts, what else are they doing but casting out demons? And what are believers doing who give up the secular words of their former life and speak of the sacred mysteries, and describe as far as they can the praise and power of their Creator, speaking with new tongues? When they remove malice from the hearts of others by their good words of exhortation, they are picking up snakes, and when then they hear dangerous advice but are not drawn toward wicked deeds, they are indeed drinking something deadly, but it will not harm them. As often as they catch sight of their neighbors faltering in their good works, and they gather round them in all their strength, and by the example of their own deeds fortify their wavering lives, what are they doing but laying their hands on the sick to heal them? Surely these miracles are all the greater to the extent that they are spiritual; they are all the greater to the extent that it is not bodies but souls which are being raised up.

And so, dearly beloved, you perform these signs, if you wish to, by God's power. Those external signs cannot pro-

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7. 1 Co 14:22

duce life, but it can come from those who do them. Material miracles sometimes demonstrate holiness but they do not create it, whereas the spiritual actions performed in the soul do not make the power of life evident to the senses but create it. Even the wicked perform the former; none but the good can perform the latter. Hence Truth said of some people: *Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, cast out demons in your name, do many mighty deeds in your name?' Then I will declare to them, 'I do not know you; depart from me you workers of iniquity.'*[8] Dearly beloved, do not love signs which the wicked too can perform; love those miracles of love and devotion, which I have just now spoken of. The more they are hidden, the safer they are; and the less glory that comes from humans, the greater will be our recompense in the eyes of God.

And after the Lord Jesus had spoken to them he was taken up into heaven, and took his seat at the right hand of God. We know from the Old Testament that Elijah was taken up into heaven.[9] But the aerial heaven is one thing, and the aetherial heaven another. The aerial heaven is near the earth and so we speak of the birds of heaven because we see them flying about in the air. Elijah was raised up to the aerial heaven, so that he could be led suddenly to a certain hidden region of the earth, where he could live in great tranquillity of body and spirit, until his return at the end of the world to pay the debt of death. He only postponed death, he did not avoid it. Our Redeemer, since he did not postpone his death, overcame it; by rising he destroyed it, and he declared the glory of his resurrection by his ascension. We note too that we read of Elijah's ascending in a chariot, so that it is made clear that he was only a human being and needed help from outside. We are shown that it was done with the help of angels, since one who has weighed down the weakness of his nature could not ascend to the aerial heaven by himself. But we don't read of our Redeemer that he was raised up by a chariot or by angels. He who made all things was borne above all things by his own power. For he was returning to his own place, going back to a place he had never left, since when he ascended into heaven through his human nature he bound together heaven and earth through his divine nature.

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[8] Mt 7:22–23 [9] 2 K 2:11

Just as Joseph, who was sold by his brothers,[10] prefigured our Redeemer's betrayal for money, so Enoch who was transported,[11] and Elijah who was raised to the aerial heaven, symbolize the Lord's ascension. The Lord had forerunners and witnesses of his ascension, the one before the law, the other under the law, so that when he came, he was able truly to penetrate the heavens. The order of the raising up of these two is also distinguished by certain degrees. Enoch is remembered as having been transported and Elijah as having been carried up to heaven; he who came after them was neither transported nor carried up to the aerial heaven, but he penetrated it by his own power.

The Lord showed that he would bestow purity of body on us who believe in him, and increase in us over time the virtue of chastity, by transporting from here those who, as his servants, symbolized his ascension, and by his own ascent into heaven. We read that Enoch had a wife and children, but that Elijah had neither. Consider, then, how holy purity increased by degrees, as shown by his servants who were transported and by the Lord himself who ascended. Enoch, who was born as a result of sexual intercourse, and begot children through sexual intercourse, was transported; Elijah, who was born as a result of sexual intercourse, but did not beget any children, was taken up; the Lord, who neither begot children through sexual intercourse nor was begotten that way himself, was assumed into heaven.

We must consider why Mark said that *He took his seat*[7]* at the right hand of God, while Stephen said, *I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God.*[12]

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[10] Gn 37:28 [11] Gn 5:24 [12] Ac 7:56

Why does Mark testify that he is seated, and Stephen that he saw him standing? You know, my friends, that one is seated to judge, and one stands to fight or bring assistance. Our Redeemer was assumed into heaven; he judges all things now, and at the end of everything he will come as judge. Mark describes him as sitting after his assumption, since we will see him as judge at the end after the glory of his ascension. Stephen, who was still engaged in a painful struggle, saw the one who was his helper standing, because his grace was fighting for him from heaven so that he could overthrow the unbelief of his persecutors on earth.

And they set out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming their message by the signs that accompanied it. What must we see in this, what must we remember, except that obedience followed the command, and signs followed their obedience?

With God's support I have completed a brief explanation of the reading from the Gospel. It remains for me to say something in regard to such a great festival. First we must ask why angels appeared when the Lord was born;[13] but we do not read that they appeared in white garments, whereas we read that at his ascension the angels who were sent appeared in white garments. This is what is written: *As they were looking on he was lifted up, and a cloud took him from their sight. And while they were gazing at him as he was going into heaven, behold, two men in white garments stood beside him.*[14] The white garments reveal the joy and festivity in our hearts. Why did the angels not appear in white garments, at the Lord's birth, whereas they did when he ascended, if not because it became an occasion of great festivity for the angels when the God-man penetrated heaven. When the Lord was born his divinity seemed to have been humbled, whereas when he ascended his humanity was exalted. White garments indeed are more fitting for exaltation than for humiliation. At his assumption it was right that the angels should be seen in white garments because he who appeared as God made humble at his birth was revealed in his ascension as a human being on high.

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[13] Lk 2:9-13 [14] Ac 1:9-10

But on this festive day we must particularly consider this, dearly beloved, that our decree of condemnation has been cancelled today,[15] our sentence to corruption has been changed. The nature which was told, *You are dust and into dust you shall go,*[16] today went to heaven. In respect to this raising up of our body Job referred to the Lord as a bird. He beheld Judea not understanding the mystery of his ascension, and he expressed this by saying of its unbelief: *It did not know the path of the bird.*[17] The Lord is aptly called a bird, since he launched his body into the air. Anyone not believing that he had ascended into heaven did not know the path of this bird.

Of this festival the psalmist said: *Your splendor has been raised above the heavens;*[18] and again: *God has ascended with a shout of joy, and the Lord with the sound of a trumpet;*[19] and again: *Ascending on high he led captivity captive, he gave gifts to men.*[20] Ascending on high, he led captivity captive since he swallowed up our perishable nature by the power of his imperishable one. He gave gifts to men, because after sending the Spirit from above he gave to one the utterance of wisdom, to another the utterance of knowledge, to another the gift of virtue, to another the gift of healing, to another various tongues, to another the interpretation of utterances.[21] He gave gifts to men.

Of the glory of his ascension Habakkuk too spoke: *The sun was raised up, and the moon stood in its place.*[22] What does 'sun' signify but the Lord, and what does 'moon' signify but the Church? Until the Lord ascended into heaven his holy Church dreaded the world's adversities in every way; after being strengthened by his ascension it openly preached what it had secretly believed. *The sun was raised up, and the*

[15] Col 2:14
[16] Gn 3:19
[17] Jb 28:7
[18] Ps 8:1 (V 8:2)
[19] Ps 47:5 (V 46:6)
[20] Ps 68:18 (V 67:19)
[21] 1 Cor 12:8–10
[22] Hab 3:11 (LXX)

moon stood in its place, because when the Lord sought heaven his holy Church grew in the authority of its preaching.

And so the Church says through Solomon: *See how he comes leaping on the mountains, bounding over the hills.*[23] It pondered the height of his great works and said: *See how he comes leaping on the mountains.*[8*]. By coming for our redemption the Lord gave some leaps, if I may say so. Dearly beloved, do you want to recognize those leaps of his? From heaven to the womb, from the womb to the manger, from the manger to the cross, from the cross to the sepulchre; and from the sepulchre he returned into heaven. You see how Truth, having made himself known in the flesh, gave some leaps for us to make us run after him. *He exulted like a giant to run his course,*[24] so that we might tell to him from our hearts: *Draw me after you; let us run in the fragrance of your ointments.*[25]

Dearly beloved, it is fitting that we should follow him in our hearts to where we believe he has ascended in his body. Let us flee earthly desires. Let nothing here below delight us who have a father in heaven. We must consider very carefully that he who was mild at his ascent will be terrible at his return. He will demand from us with great strictness whatever he has commanded of us with gentleness. Let no one take lightly the time of repentance granted us, let no one neglect to have concern for himself while he can do so, because our Redeemer will come with great strictness in proportion to the great patience he has shown us before the judgment. Reflect on these things, my friends, constantly turn them over in your minds. The disturbance of things may still be driving your hearts to and fro, but fix the anchor of your hope now in your eternal home. Establish your mind's attention in the true light. We have heard that the Lord has ascended into heaven. Let our belief be the subject of our meditation. If the weakness of our body still holds us here, let us follow him by the footsteps of our love. He who gave us our desire will not fail us, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.

[23] Sg 2:8 [24] Ps 19:5 (V 18:6) [25] Sg 1:4 (V 1:3)

NOTES

1. Homily 29 in Migne (*PL* 1213). Both Bu and W assign this Gospel pericope to the feast of the Lord's Ascension. The subject matter of the homily shows clearly that this was the liturgical occasion on which it was delivered.
2. The first three sentences of this homily were taken over by Bede for his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 413, 1991/96), and the first five sentences for his *Commentary on Mark* (CC 120: 643, 1879/87).
3. Two sentences used by Bede in his *Commentary on Mark* (CC 120: 645, 1944/46).
4. Two more sentences adopted by Bede for his *Commentary on Mark* (CC 120: 645, 1946/51).
5. Four sentences to be found in Bede's *Commentary on Mark* (CC 120: 645, 1951/59).
6. An entire paragraph inserted by Bede in his *Commentary on Mark* (CC 120: 645, 1968 - 646, 1994).
7. This paragraph, plus the following paragraph, are to be found in Bede's *Commentary on Mark* (CC 120: 646, 1996/2011).
8. From here to the end of this paragraph is a passage inserted by Bede in his *Commentary on the Song of Songs* (CC 119B: 362, 128/35).

homily 30

Jesus answered and said to him, If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. One who does not love me does not keep my words, and the word which you have heard is not mine but the Father's who sent me. I have spoken these things to you while I remained with you. But the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father is sending in my name, will teach you all everything and remind you of all I have said to you. My peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.
(John 14:23–27)[1*]

I will touch briefly on the words of the Gospel reading dearly beloved, so that I may then stay longer in the contemplation of so great a solemnity. Today the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples with a sudden sound, and completely changed their earthbound way of thinking by his love. When tongues of fire appeared outwardly,[1] their hearts within them were set afire; since they received God in a vision of fire they were gently enflamed by love. The Holy Spirit is love, and so John says: *God is love.*[2] A person who desires God with his whole heart already possesses the one he loves; no one could love God unless he possessed the one he loves.

If any one of you should be asked if he loved God, he would answer with entire confidence and complete conviction, 'I do.' But you heard at the beginning of the reading what Truth said: *'If anyone loves me, he will keep my word.'* The proof of love is its manifestation in deeds.[2*] This is why

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[1] Ac 2:2–4 [2] 1 Jn 4:16

John says in his Letter: *He who says, 'I love God,' and does not observe his commandments is a liar.*[3] Our love is true if we keep our self-will in check according to his commandments. One who is still wandering here and there through his unlawful desires does not really love God, because he is opposing him in his self-will.

'And my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.' Consider, dearly beloved, how great this solemnity is that commemorates the coming of God as a guest in our hearts. If some rich and powerful friend were to enter your home, you would quickly clean the entire house for fear something there might offend your friend's eyes when he entered. Let any one then who is preparing his inner house for God cleanse away the dirt of his evil deeds.

You see what Truth tells us: *'We will come and make our home with him.'* He does indeed enter the hearts of some but does not make his home there, because through repentance they acquire respect for God, but during a time of temptation they forget that they have repented and so return to committing sins as if they had never wept over them at all. The Lord comes into the heart and makes his home in one who truly loves God and observes his commandments, since the love of his divine nature so penetrates him that he does not turn away from it during times of temptation. That person loves truly whose heart does not consent to be overcome by wicked pleasures. The more pleasure a person finds in lower things the greater is his separation from heavenly love.

'One who does not love me does not keep my words.' Dearly beloved, enter into yourselves and inquire if you truly love God. But let no one believe the answer his heart gives in his own case apart from testimony of his works. Let him examine his words, his thoughts and his life concerning the love of his Creator. God's love is never idle. Where it exists, it does great things; if it refuses to work, it is not love.

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3. 1 Jn 2:4

'And the word which you have heard is not mine but the Father's who sent me.' You know, dearly beloved, that the one speaking, the only-begotten Son, is the Father's word; therefore the word which the Son speaks is not his but the Father's, because the Son himself is the Father's word.

'I have spoken these things to you while I remained with you.' How would he not remain with them? When he was about to ascend into heaven he made a promise, saying: *See, I am with you all days, even to the end of the world.*[4] But the Word who had become a man both remained and withdrew: he withdrew from them physically, but remained in his divinity. He assured them that he remained with them then, because he who was always present by his invisible power was now withdrawing from their sight.

The Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father is sending in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all whatever I have said to you.' Many of you, dearly beloved, know that the Greek word 'Paraclete' means in Latin 'advocate' or 'consoler.' He is called an advocate because he intervenes before the Father's justice on behalf of the wrongdoings of sinners; he who is of one substance with the Father and the Son is said to plead earnestly on behalf of sinners because he causes those whom he fills to do so. Hence Paul says: *For the Spirit himself pleads for us with unutterable groanings.*[5] But one who pleads is of less importance than the one receiving the plea. How is the Spirit, then, who is not less important, said to plead? The Spirit pleas, rousing those he fills to plead.

The same Spirit is called a consoler because when he prepares a hope of pardon for those grieving over their sins he is lifting up their hearts from sorrow and affliction.

It is justly promised that *'He will teach you all things,'* because unless the Spirit is[3*] present in the heart of a listener, the teacher's utterance is useless. No one should attribute to his teacher what he understands from him, because unless there is an inner teacher, the one outside is exerting himself in vain. You all hear equally the single voice of the person speaking, and yet you each have a different perception of the meaning. The voice is not different—why do your hearts understand it differently? Is it not that through what the speaker's voice counsels generally there is an inner master who teaches each one individually about its meaning?

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[4] Mt 28:20 [5] Rm 8:26

John says about this anointing of the Spirit: *As his anointing teaches you about everything.*[6] No one is instructed by a voice when his heart is not anointed by the Spirit. But why do I speak in this way about human teaching, when our Creator himself does not speak for the instruction of any person unless he speaks to that person by the anointing of the Spirit? Before he killed his brother Cain heard: *You have sinned; stop!*[7] Because his sins demanded it he was warned by the voice, but he was unable to hear God's words by the anointing of the Spirit and so he refused to regard them.

We must ask why it is said of the Spirit, *'He will remind you of everything,'* when reminding is usually the action of someone of lesser importance. We sometimes use 'remind' to mean 'furnish with information', and so we say that the invisible Spirit 'reminds' us because he provides us with knowledge not as an inferior but as one who knows what is secret.

'My peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you.' On earth I leave it with you, in heaven I give it to you; to my followers I leave it, to those who reach heaven, I give it.

Dearly beloved, I have completed my brief explanation of the words of the holy reading. Now let me turn my mind to the contemplation of this great feast day. But a lesson from the Acts of the Apostles has also been read aloud to you along with the lesson from the Gospel, and so let me draw something from it as an aid to our reflections. You have heard that the Holy Spirit appeared above the disciples in fiery tongues, and gave them the knowledge of all languages.[8] What does this miracle signify, but that the Church, filled with the same Spirit, was going to speak with the voice of all nations? Those who tried to build a tower in opposition to God destroyed communication in a single language,[9] but in these who humbly feared God all languages were united. In these, humility was rewarded with power, in them pride was rewarded with confusion.

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[6] 1 Jn 2:27 [7] Gn 4:7 (LXX)

We need to ask why the Holy Spirit, who is coeternal with the Father and the Son, appeared in fire; why it appeared simultaneously in fire and in tongues; why sometimes it appeared as a dove and was sometimes revealed in fire; why it appeared above the only-begotten Son in the likeness of a dove,[10] and above the disciples in fire, so that it neither came down upon the Lord in fire, nor was it revealed above the disciples as a dove. And so let me turn to these four questions I have stated in an attempt to resolve them.

The Spirit, who is coeternal with the Father and the Son, was revealed in fire because God is an immaterial and indescribable and invisible fire, as Paul testifies, *Our God is a consuming fire.*[11] God is called a fire because he consumes the rust of sin. Of this fire Truth said: *I have come to cast fire upon the earth, and what do I wish but that it burn?*[12] By earth he means earth-bound hearts, which evil spirits trample on when they continually heap up base thoughts within themselves. The Lord sends fire upon the earth when he enkindles the hearts of the materially-minded with the breath of the Holy Spirit, and the earth burns when a heart which was materially-minded and frigid from its former pleasures leaves behind the desires of the present age and is set on fire with love for God. Therefore it is fitting that the Spirit, which drives numbness and cold from every heart, fills and warms it to desire its own eternity, appeared in fire.

It was revealed in fiery tongues because the Spirit is coeternal with the Son, and the tongue has the closest connection with the word. The Son is the Father's word, and because the Spirit and the Son, the Word, are of one substance, the Spirit had to be revealed as a tongue. Or since a word is produced by a tongue, the Spirit appeared in tongues because whoever is touched by the Holy Spirit confesses the Word of God, his only-begotten Son; one who possesses the tongue of the Holy Spirit cannot deny the Word of God. Or the Spirit appeared in tongues because it causes all it fills both to burn and to speak.

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[8] Ac 2:2-4
[9] Gn 11:5-9
[10] Mt 3:16
[11] Heb 12:29
[12] Lk 12:49

Teachers possess fiery tongues, because when they preach out of love for God they enflame the hearts of their hearers. A teacher's utterance is useless if it cannot provide the flame of love. The men who said: *Were not our hearts burning within us as he spoke to us on the road and explained the scriptures to us*[13] received this fire of teaching from the mouth of the Truth himself. When words are clearly heard the mind is set on fire, numbness and cold recede, the heart becomes solicitous in its desire for heavenly things on high and strange to earthly desires. The true love which fills it torments it to the point of tears, but while it is tormented by such strong emotion it feeds on these very torments. It gladly listens to the heavenly precepts and instructed by the commandments it is as if it were being set on fire by so many torches. A heart once made torpid afterwards burns with the words it hears.

Hence Moses says aptly: *The law was a flaming fire in his right hand.*[14] The condemned who are to be placed there are called God's left hand, while the elect are called his right hand.[15] The law is a flaming fire in God's right hand because the elect do not hear the heavenly precept with a cold heart, but on hearing them they are set on fire with the torches of an interior love. A word is brought to their ears, and their hearts glow within them and are consumed by the flames of inner delight.

The Holy Spirit was revealed as a dove and as fire because it makes all those it has filled guileless and ardent, guileless because of their purity, ardent because of their zeal. Neither guilelessness nor fervor alone is pleasing to God. Truth himself told us to *Be wise as serpents and guileless as doves.*[16] In this connection we must note that the Lord did not choose to teach his disciples about either the dove or the serpent alone to light up the dove's guilelessness with the serpent's shrewdness, and to temper the serpent's shrewdness with the guilelessness of the dove. Paul told us: *Do not become childish in your outlook.*[17] Here we have learned the prudence of the serpent; now let us be instructed in the guilelessness of the dove: *But be children in regard to wickedness.* So it was said of Job: *He was a guileless and upright man.*[18] What is uprightness or guilelessness alone? Since the Spirit teaches both of them it was right that it should be shown as both fire and dove. Every heart touched by its grace may then become serene, gentle and tender, and on fire with zeal for righteousness.

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[13] Lk 24:32 [14] Dt 33:2 [15] Mt 25:33

Finally we must ask why the Spirit appeared over our Redeemer, the mediator between God and men,[19] as a dove but over the disciples as fire. It is certain that the only-begotten Son is judge of the human race. Who could bear his righteousness if before he gathered us in through his gentleness he had willed to examine our sins through his righteous fervor? Having become human for the sake of human beings, he showed himself mild towards us, willing rather to gather us than to smite us. He willed first to correct us gently so as to have some later on to save at the judgment. Therefore the Spirit had to appear over him as a dove since he was not coming to smite our sins now in his fervor but to continue to put up with them in his gentleness. But on the other hand the Holy Spirit had to be manifested over the disciples as fire so that spiritual passion might rouse them against themselves, these men who were merely human beings and therefore sinners. Then through repentance they would punish in themselves the sins which God was sparing through his gentleness.

[16] Mt 10:16 [17] 1 Co 14:20 [18] Jb 1:1 [19] 1 Tm 2:5

That who adhered to the heavenly teaching could not themselves be without sin John testifies: *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.*[20] Therefore the Spirit came to human beings as fire but appeared to the Lord as a dove because we must pay careful regard to our sins through our zeal for rectitude, the sins the Lord kindly tolerates through his gentleness. We must always consume them by the fire of repentance. The Spirit was shown over our Redeemer as a dove but upon human beings as fire, because the more our Judge has restrained his severity towards us, the more we must raise our infirmity against itself.

Now that I have given an account of these four statements, let me go on to reflect on the gifts of the Spirit. It has been written that *His Spirit has adorned the heavens.*[21] The adornments of the heavens are the virtues of preachers. Paul gives us a list of these adornments: *To one is given by the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith in the same Spirit, to another the gift of healing in the one Spirit, to another the work of the virtues, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various tongues, to another the interpretation of utterances. These are the work of one and the same Spirit, who distributes them to each one just as he chooses.*[22] There are then as many adornments of the heavens as there are accomplishments of preachers. So it is written: *The heavens have been established by the word of the Lord, and all their strength by the Spirit of his mouth.*[23] The word of the Lord is the Father's Son. But to show that the whole holy Trinity worked together to establish these heavens, by which he means the holy apostles, it is immediately said of the divinity of the Holy Spirit: *And all their strength by the Spirit of his mouth.* The strength of these heavens is derived from the Spirit, because the apostles would not have ventured to stand up against the powers of this world unless the courage of the Holy Spirit had strengthened them.

20. 1 Jn 1:8 21. Jb 26:13 22. 1 Co 12:8–11 23. Ps 33:6 (V 32:6)

We know what the Church's teachers were like before the coming of the Spirit, and we see how courageous they became after the coming. The woman keeping the door, if we asked her, would certainly tell us of the great weakness and terror that possessed the shepherd of the Church, near whose holy body we are sitting, before the coming of the Spirit.[24] One word from a woman struck him down; while he was afraid of dying, he denied life. Peter, on the earth, made his denial, while the thief was making his confession on the cross.[25]

But let us hear what the man who had been so afraid was like after the coming of the Spirit. There was a meeting of the council and the elders, and after beating them they declared to the apostles that they were not to speak in the name of Jesus. With great authority Peter replied: *We must obey God rather than men;*[26] and again: *Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than God you must judge. We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.*[27] And they left the presence of the assembly, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer abuse for the name of Jesus.[28] See how Peter, who had been afraid of words, rejoiced at being beaten; how he who had feared a woman's question before the coming of the Holy Spirit, after his beating scorned the power of the ruling men.

It is agreeable to lift up eyes of faith to the power of this Worker, and to look here and there at our ancestors in the Old and New Testaments. With the eyes of faith open on David, Amos, Daniel, Peter, Paul and Matthew, I wish to analyze the nature of the workman, the Holy Spirit. But I fail in my analysis. The Spirit filled a boy who played upon a harp and made him a psalmist,[29] a shepherd and herdsman who pruned sycamore trees and made him a prophet,[30] a boy given to abstinence[31] and made him a judge of

[24] Jn 18:17
[25] Lk 23:41–42
[26] Ac 5:29
[27] Ac 4:19–20
[28] Ac 5:41
[29] 1 S 16:18
[30] Am 7:14–15
[31] Dn 1:8

mature men,[32] a fisherman and made him a preacher,[33] a persecutor and made him the teacher of the Gentiles,[34] a tax collector and made him an evangelist.[35]

What a skilful workman this Spirit is! There is no question of delay in learning. It no sooner touches the mind in regard to anything it chooses than it teaches; its very touch is teaching. It changes a human mind in a moment to enlighten it; suddenly what it was it no longer is, suddenly it is what it was not.

Let us consider the condition in which the Spirit found the holy preachers on this day, and what it made of them. There is no doubt that they remained in a single inner room from fear of the Jews.[36] Each of them knew only his native language, but as yet they did not venture to speak openly of Christ even in the language they knew. The Spirit came and taught them to speak in a variety of languages[37] and to be strong in heart with its own strength. They began to speak openly of Christ even in foreign languages, when formerly they were afraid to speak about him even in their own. Their hearts were on fire, and they disregarded the physical suffering which they formerly feared. They overcame the power of physical terror out of love for their Creator. Formerly they had given way to their adversaries out of fear, but now they ruled over them in the power of the Spirit. Because it raised them to such a height, what can I say but that it made the hearts of earthly human beings heaven?

Ponder, dearly beloved, the relationship between today's solemn observance of the coming of the Holy Spirit and the incarnation of the only-begotten Son. As the latter is worthy of honor, so also is the former. In the latter God took upon himself a human nature, creating it for himself, but in the former human beings took upon themselves a God coming down from above. In the latter God became a

32. Dn 13:45-46
23. Mt 4:19
34. Ac 9:1-20
35. Lk 5:27-28
36. Ac 1:13; Jn 20:19
37. Ac 2:4

human conformably to nature, in the former human beings became gods by adoption. If we do not want to remain unspirited in death, dearly beloved, let us love this life-giving Spirit.

But because flesh does not know Spirit, perhaps someone may have this unspirited thought: 'How can I love one I do not know?' Even I grant that a mind which is intent on visible things does not know how to see what is invisible. It thinks of nothing but what it can see, and even when it is not involved with them, it is subconsciously taking in representations of them. While it is concerned with representations of what is material it cannot rise to what is immaterial. So it comes about that the more familiarly it carries bodily creatures in its thoughts, the less is it of its Creator.

But while we cannot see God, there is something we can do to open a way for the eye of our understanding to come to him. It is certain that we can see now in his servants one whom we can in no way see in himself. When we see them doing astonishing things, we can be sure that God dwells in their hearts. In what is immaterial, let us take advantage of immaterial things. None of us can look directly at the rising sun by gazing at its orb. Our eyes are repelled as they strain to see its rays. But we look at mountains bathed in sunlight and see that it has risen. Because we cannot see the Sun of righteousness[38] himself, let us see the mountains bathed in his brightness, I mean the holy apostles. They shine with virtues and gleam with miracles. The brightness of the risen Sun has poured over them. Since he is invisible in himself, he has made himself visible to us through them, as if through mountains bathed in light. The power of his divinity is in itself like the sun in the sky; in human beings it is like the sun shining on earth. Let us then observe the Sun of righteousness on the earth, whom we cannot see in the sky; then when we walk by his light on earth with the feet of our works without stumbling, we may sometimes raise our eyes to observe him in heaven.

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[38] Ml 4:2

We make our way by foot on earth without stumbling if we love God and our neighbor with our whole heart. We cannot truly love God without loving our neighbor, nor can we truly love our neighbor without loving God. This is why I have already said in another sermon[4*] that we read that the Holy Spirit was given a second time to the disciples. First it was given by the Lord while he was still dwelling on earth, and later while he is watching over us in heaven: on earth that we may love our neighbors, from heaven that we may love God. Why first on earth and later from heaven, except for the reason given us openly by John: *How can one person who does not love his brother whom he sees love God whom he does not see?*[39]

Let us love our neighbors, my friends, let us love the one who is near us, so that we may be able to reach the love of the one who is above us. Let our hearts reflect on what our neighbors hold up to God so that they may be found completely worthy to rejoice in God with them. Then shall we reach the happiness of the heavenly multitude, the happiness of which we have received an assurance from the Holy Spirit. Let us move forward toward that goal where we shall be happy without end with all our love. There is the holy community of heavenly citizens, there the sure solemn observance, there untroubled rest, there the true peace which is no longer left to us but given to us. Through our Lord Jesus Christ who lives and reigns with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.

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[39] 1 Jn 4:20

NOTES

1. Homily 30 in Migne (*PL* 1220). In Bu and W this gospel pericope is designated for use on Pentecost Sunday. The subject matter of the homily indicates that this was the occasion on which the homily was preached.
2. These three sentences at the end of the paragraph are found in Bede's *Commentary on the First Letter of John* (CC 121: 320, 32/35).
3. Two further sentences are to be found in Bede's *Commentary on the First Letter of John* (CC 121: 298, 354 - 299, 359).
4. Homily 26.

homily 31

He spoke this parable: A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard and he came looking for fruit on it but found none. He said to the man who looked after the vineyard: 'Look here, for three years I have been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and I have found none. Cut it down. Why should it be taking up the ground?' And answering, he said, 'Sir, leave it for this year too, while I dig around it and apply a measure of dung. It may bear fruit; if not you can cut it down in the future.' He was teaching in the synagogue on the sabbath, and a woman was there who for eighteen years had a spirit that left her enfeebled. She was bent over and was quite unable to look upwards. When Jesus had seen her, he called her to him and said to her, 'Woman, you are rid of your infirmity!' He laid his hand on her, and immediately she straightened up, and glorified God.

(Luke 13:6–13)[1]*

Our Lord and Redeemer sometimes speaks to us through his Gospel in words, sometimes in actions; sometimes in words alone, but sometimes in words which interpret his actions. You have heard two things from the Gospel, my friends: a barren fig tree and a woman who was bent double. And he exercised his lovingkindness in both cases. He told the former through a parable, but in the latter case by an action. The barren fig tree has the same significance as the woman who was bent down, and the fig tree saved as the woman standing up straight. The owner of the vineyard came to the fig tree three times without finding any fruit, and the woman who was straightened up had been bent double for eighteen years. The eighteen years have the same significance as the three times the owner of the vineyard came to the barren fig tree. And now that I have looked forward and briefly touched upon the whole matter, let me discuss the details of the reading in order.

A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard and he came looking for fruit on it but found none. What does the fig tree signify but our human nature? What does the woman who was bent down do but signify the same nature? Human nature was planted well like the fig tree, and created well like the woman; but it fell into sin of its own accord, and preferred neither fruitful works nor its upright state. It sank into sin by its own will, and lost its upright state, because it was unwilling to produce the fruit of obedience. It was created in God's likeness, but did not stand firm in its grandeur because it refused to preserve the state in which it had been planted or created. The owner of the vineyard came to the fig tree three times because he was concerned for the nature of the human race before he gave the law, while it was subject to the law, and during the time of grace; he came looking, warning, staying with us.

He said to the man who looked after the vineyard: 'Look here, for three years I have been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree, and I have found none.' He came before he gave the law, because he made known through our natural understanding how each person was to act by his example toward his neighbor. He came while in the time of the law, because he taught it by giving his commandments. He came after the law, by grace, because he revealed the presence of his lovingkindness by exhibiting it. He complained that in three years he had not found any fruit since the natural law he had breathed into them had not improved the hearts of some depraved among them, nor had his commandments educated them, nor the miracles of his human nature converted them. What does the man who looked after the fig tree represent but the order of those who oversee the Church? While they preside over it, they are showing care for the Lord's vineyard. The apostle Peter was the first to look after this vineyard. I, unworthy as I am, follow him insofar as I exert myself in conveying instruction to you, in interceding for you, and in reproving you.

We must listen to what was said to the man who looked after the vineyard about the barren tree with great fear: *Cut it down. Why should it be taking up the ground?* Each of you, in his own way, inasmuch as he has a place in this present life, takes up the ground like a barren tree, if he does not produce the fruit of good works. In the place where he is, he is denying to others the opportunity to work. But any person powerful in this world, if he lacks the fruit of good works, is also a hindrance to the rest. All those who are subject to him are covered with the example of his wickedness as by the shadow of evil-doing. The barren tree stands above them, and the ground beneath it lies sterile. The shadow of the barren tree is thick above; the sun's rays are never allowed to reach the ground, because when any of those subject to him look at the wicked example of their wicked master, they too are deprived of the light of truth and remain unfruitful. The shadow covers them and they do not receive the sun's heat. The reason they remain cold and apart from God is that they are being wickedly overshadowed in this world. This wicked and powerful person, whoever he may be, scarcely seeks God at all. After he has destroyed himself, the only thing we need to ask is, why is he also a hindrance to others? Hence the owner of the vineyard was right to ask, *'Why should it be taking up ground?'* A person who troubles the hearts of others is taking up the ground; a person who does not use the place he holds for good works is taking up the ground.

But it is our duty to make intercession for people like these. Let us listen to what the man who looks after the vineyard says: *'Sir, leave it for this year too, while I dig around it.'* What does it mean to dig around the fig tree except to reprove those whose hearts are fruitless? Every ditch leads downwards. When a rebuke reveals a heart to itself it humbles it. As often as we correct some one for his sin it is as if we are digging around a barren tree, giving it the proper kind of care.

Let us listen to what he mentions after the digging: *'And apply a measure of dung.'* What is a measure of dung but the memory of one's sins? Hence the prophet says: *The beasts of burden have become putrid in their own dung.*[1] For beasts of burden to become putrid in their own dung means for all those who are materialistic to end their lives in the stench of dissipation. As often as we reprove a materialistic heart for its sins, as often as we draw back to its memory the wrongs it has committed, it is as if we are turning a measure of dung on to a barren tree. It is to call to mind the evils it has done, and grow fertile to the gift of compunction as if from the stench.

A measure of dung is applied to the root of a tree when the memory is touched by an awareness of its own depravity, when a heart rouses itself to weeping through repentance, when it renews the gift of good works, and the root of the heart is made fertile again for works as if by its contact with the dung. It bewails what it remembers it has done, and becomes hateful to itself when it recalls what it was. It directs its efforts against itself, and arouses its mind for better things. The tree returns to a fruitful state as a result of the stench, since the mind revives itself for good works by reflecting on its sins.

There are many who listen to reproofs and yet refuse to come to repentance. They are green but they stand barren before God in this world. But let us hear what the man who looked after the fig tree adds: *'It may bear fruit; if not you can cut it down in the future.'* A person who refuses to grow fertile and fruitful in this life through being reproved will fall in the next, where he will no longer be able to rise again through repentance. He will be cut down in the future, although he may appear to be standing here without fruit, green.

He was teaching in the synagogue on the sabbath, and a woman was there who for eighteen years had a spirit that left her

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[1] Jl 1:17

enfeebled. I said earlier that the three times the owner of the vineyard came to the barren fig tree has the same significance as the eighteen years in which the woman was bent double. Man was created on the sixth day, and on the same sixth day all the works of the Lord were completed.[2] Six multiplied by three comes to eighteen. Because man who was created on the sixth day was unwilling to perform perfect works, but was enfeebled before the law was given, under the law, and at the beginning of the time of grace, the woman was bent double for eighteen years.

She was bent over and was quite unable to look upwards. Every sinner who thinks about the things of earth and fails to seek those of heavenly things is unable to look upwards. When he follows his lower desires his heart is bent double and he is always looking at what he is continually thinking about. Turn into your hearts, dearly beloved. Look at what you are turning over in your thoughts at all hours. One person thinks about public honors, another about money, another about the acquisition of property. All these are inferior things. When your heart is involved with such things it is bent out of its upright condition. Since it is not rising toward heavenly desires, it resembles the woman who was bent over and unable to look upwards.

When Jesus had seen her, he called her to him and said to her: 'Woman, you are rid of your infirmity.' He laid his hand upon her, and immediately she straightened up. He called her and straightened her up, because he enlightened and helped her. He calls us, but does not straighten us up, when we are enlightened by his grace but because our merits do not demand it he cannot help us. Often we see what we have to do but do not carry it out; we struggle and remain weak. Our judgment recognizes what is right, but we lack the strength to do it. Part of the punishment for sin is that we are given the ability to see what is good, but through our fault we are prevented from taking hold of what we see.

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[2] Gn 1:27-2:2

Our repeated sins bind our hearts, so that we cannot rise to an upright condition. They try, but then slip back. Of necessity they fall even when they do not want to, since they have so long acted according to their own wills.

The psalmist spoke figuratively of the human race in regard to our bent condition: *I was bent over and humbled on all sides.*[3] Contemplative man was indeed created to behold the heavenly light. Because his sins deserved it, he was cast out to endure the darkness of his heart. Because he had no desire for things on high, he stretched out to things below. With no desire for what is of heaven he was constantly reflecting on the things of earth. He cried out within himself what the psalmist grieved for in his people: *I was bent over and humbled on all sides.* If a human being who had lost his heavenly contemplation were to think only of his physical necessities he would be bent over and humbled, but not on all sides. When it is not only necessity that casts him down from his thoughts of things on high, but forbidden pleasures bring him low as well, he is not just bent over but bent over on all sides.

And so another prophet says of unclean spirits: *There are those who have said to your soul, 'Bow down, that we may walk over you.'*[4] The soul stands upright when it desires the things of heaven and does not bend down to what is low. When evil spirits see it standing in its upright condition they cannot walk over it. Walking over it means scattering unclean desires in front of it. Therefore they say, *'Bow down, that we may walk over you.'* If the soul does not cast itself down by longing for what is low, their wickedness has no power over it. They are unable to pass over by that way, because they fear it greatly when it inflexibly opposes them by concentrating on the things of heaven.

Dearly beloved, let us not provide a road for the evil spirits in ourselves when we long eagerly for earthly things, when we are bent double by the desire for the things of time. Let us be ashamed to long for earthly things, to offer our backs for our adversaries to climb over. A person who is always gazing at the ground is bent double, and the one who seeks what is low fails to remember the price of his redemption. This is why Moses said that no hunchback should be promoted to the priesthood.[5] As many of us as have been redeemed by Christ's blood have become members of our High Priest. Hence Peter has told us: *For you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood.*[6] A hunchback is always gazing at what is below him. He is not allowed to be a priest because anyone intent on earthly things alone is a witness against himself that he is not a member of the High Priest. A believing people is forbidden to use fish without fins for food.[7] Fish with fins and scales even leap up above the water. What do the fish with fins represent if not chosen souls? They alone pass over into the body of the heavenly Church. Supported now by the fins of the virtues, they know how to leap up through their heavenly desire in order to long for things above through contemplation; although they may slip back into themselves again because of their mortal bodies.

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[3] Ps 38:8 (V 37:9)
[4] Is 51:23

If we recognize now the good things of our heavenly home, let us be dissatisfied with being bent double, dearly beloved. Let us place before our eyes the woman who was bent double and the barren tree. Let us recall the evils we have done. Let us apply a measure of dung to the roots of our hearts, so that what stinks to us here as we repent may become fertile and fruitful at the time of repayment. If we cannot reach the height of virtue, God rejoices at our sorrow. We who punish the unrighteous things we have done will be pleasing to him from the very beginning of our uprightness. We won't be long in weeping, because the joys that last will quickly cleanse away our fleeting tears. Through our Lord Jesus Christ who lives and reigns with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.

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[5] Lv 21:20–21 [6] 1 P 2:9 [7] Lv 11:10

NOTES

1. Homily 31 in Migne (*PL* 1228). There is no indication in the subject matter of the homily itself, nor in the marginal notes of the early Gospel books, of the occasion of the delivery of the homily. Bu indicates at Lk 13:10 that this Gospel passage can be used at the liturgical celebration on any day of the week—*cottidiana*.

homily 32

And he said to them, The person who wants to come after me must deny himself and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. For what does it profit a person to gain the whole world, and lose and suffer the ruin of himself. Whoever is ashamed of me and my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God.

(Luke 9:23-27)[1]*

Because our Lord and Redeemer came into the world as a new kind of human being, he made new precepts known to the world. To our old way of life, which was nurtured in vice, he offered the contrast of his new way. What did the 'old man', the unspiritual person, know except to hold on to what was his, to seize what belonged to another if he could, and to covet it if he couldn't? But our heavenly physician brought medicines to meet every single vice. The art of medicine cures fevers with cold compresses, and chills by the application of heat. Similarly, our Lord set his preaching in opposition to our sins: he prescribed self-restraint to the intemperate, generosity to the stingy, gentleness to the irritable, and humility to the exalted. When he was announcing new commandments to his followers he told them: *Whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.*[1] He meant, 'You who are coveting what belongs to someone else through your old way of life, be generous even with what is your own through your zeal for the new way.'

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1. Lk 14:33

But let us listen to what he says in the present reading: *The person who wants to come after me must deny himself.* He says that we must deny ourselves. It may not be difficult for a person to abandon his possessions, but it is very difficult for him to abandon himself. Renouncing what one has is not so much, but renouncing what one is amounts to a great deal. The Lord commands those of us who are coming to him to deny ourselves because we who are coming to the public contest of the faith are taking up a struggle against evil spirits. Evil spirits possess nothing of their own in this world. We who are naked have to struggle with other naked beings. If someone who is clothed begins to struggle with one who is naked he is quickly thrown to the ground, since there is something by which he can be held. What are all earthly things except a kind of covering for the body? So let anyone who is preparing for a contest with the devil cast aside this clothing so that he will not be overcome. He should possess nothing in this world by his love for it; he should not seek the pleasures of things that are passing away, lest the desires with which he is clothed be grasped and bring about his downfall.

But it is not enough for us to abandon our possessions if we do not abandon ourselves as well. What does it mean to abandon ourselves? If we abandon ourselves, where shall we go outside of ourselves? And who is it who departs, if a person has forsaken himself? But we are one thing when we have fallen into sin, and another in the nature with which we were created; what we did is one thing, what we have become is another. Let us abandon the selves we have made by sinning, and let us continue to be the selves we have become by grace. You see a person who was proud—if he has turned to Christ he has become humble, he has abandoned himself; if a person of unrestrained desires has changed to a life of self-restraint he has certainly denied what he was; if a miser, one who previously seized what belonged to others, has ceased to go around looking for gain and learned to be generous with what belongs to him, beyond any doubt he has abandoned himself: he is the person he was created to be, not the one he is through his wickedness. That is why it is written, *Change the wicked, and they will be no more.*[2] The wicked who have been changed will be no more, not because they will altogether cease to exist in their essential being; they will cease to exist in their guilty state of ungodliness.

We abandon ourselves, we deny ourselves, when we escape what we were in our old state and strive toward what we are called to be in our new one.[2*] Let us consider how Paul, who said *It is no longer I who live,*[3] had denied himself. The cruel persecutor had been destroyed and the holy preacher had begun to live. If he had remained himself, he would not have been holy. But let the one who denied that he was alive tell us how it came about that he proclaimed holy words through the teaching of the Truth. Immediately after saying, *It is no longer I who live,* he added, *but Christ lives in me.* It is as if he were saying, 'I have indeed been destroyed by myself since I no longer live unspiritually; but according to my essential being I am not dead since I am spiritually alive in Christ.'

Paul is saying what Christ says: *The person who wants to come after me must deny himself.* Unless a person forsakes himself he does not draw near to the one who is above himself. He cannot take hold of what is beyond himself if he does not know how to sacrifice himself. The seedlings of a plant are transplanted that they may grow; we can say that they are uprooted in order that they may increase. The seeds of things disappear when they are mixed with earth, and spring up more fruitfully for the renewal of their kind; they receive the ability to manifest what they were not from appearing to have lost what they were.

[3*]But the one who has denied himself his vices has to seek the virtues in which he may grow. After saying that *the person who wants to come after me must deny himself* the Lord

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[2] Pr 12:7 [3] Ga 2:20

immediately adds that *he must take up his cross daily and follow me.* There are two ways of taking up the cross: disciplining the body through abstinence, and afflicting the heart through compassion for one's neighbor. Let us consider how Paul took up his cross in both ways. He said, *I discipline my body and subdue it, lest after preaching to others I myself should be rejected.*[4] This is the physical cross which disciplines his body; let us now hear of the mental cross of compassion for his neighbor. *Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not aflame with indignation?*[5] So that as a perfect preacher he could give us an example to follow, he carried the cross of abstinence in his body; and since he took into himself the harm done by another's weakness, he carried a cross in his heart.

But since there are certain vices that correspond to these virtues, I must speak of the vice that can beset abstinence of body, and the one that can beset compassion of heart. Sometimes vainglory besets physical abstinence. It is a near neighbor, since when people observe an emaciated body and a pale face they praise the virtue thus disclosed. They lavish praise all the more quickly as their human eyes can see the virtue through the obvious pallor. It frequently happens that what is believed to be done for the sake of God is done solely for human approbation. That Simon who was found on the road and was forced to carry the Lord's cross shows us this.[6] A person is forced to carry another's burden when he does something for vanity's sake. Whom does Simon represent but those who practice their abstinence proudly? They certainly discipline their bodies by their abstinence, but they do not seek its fruit within themselves. Simon was forced to carry the Lord's cross, because when a sinner is not led to a good deed from a good will, he does the work of a righteous person but without its fruit. Simon carried the cross, but he did not die on it. Those who practice their abstinence proudly do indeed discipline their

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4. 1 Co 9:27 5. 2 Co 11:29 6. Mt 27:32

bodies through their abstinence, but they go on living to the world through their desire for glory.

Compassion of heart is often secretly beset by a false holiness. This sometimes leads as far as compassion for a person's vices, though we are not to show compassion in dealing with faults but zeal. We owe compassion to the person, and opposition to his vices. In one and the same person, then, let us love the goodness, because he was made that way, and punish the evil he has done. Otherwise, when we rashly pardon faults we may appear to be no longer sharing in his sufferings through charity, but to be yielding through indifference.

For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.[4*] This is said to a believer, as one might say to a farmer: 'If you save your grain, you lose it; if you sow it, you recover it.' Everyone knows that when you let go of grain, in the form of seed, it disappears from sight, it falls into the ground. What makes it decay in the dirt is what makes it grow green again and be renewed. Since the Church has its times of persecution and its times of peace, our Redeemer has distinguished between these times in his precepts. We are to lay down our lives during times of persecution, but in times of peace we are to subdue the earthly desires which can so easily rule us.

For what does it profit a person to gain the whole world, and lose and suffer the ruin of himself? When we have no adversaries persecuting us, we have to be all the more careful in guarding our hearts. In times of peace, since we are at liberty to live our lives out, we are also ready to go about seeking gain. We restrain our avarice in a good way if we carefully consider the state of anyone seeking gain. Why does anyone devote himself to assembling things when he who is doing it is unable to remain where he is? Let him ponder the course he is on, and acknowledge that the little he has is enough for him.

But he may be afraid of lacking something he needs for the journey of this life. The short road is a reproach to our lengthy desires. It is useless for us to carry many things when our goal is near. We frequently overcome even our avarice, but are still impeded by keeping to righteous ways out of an inferior concern for perfection.[5*] We often reject everything that is passing away, but continue to be hindered by the habit of human respect. The righteousness we have in our minds we cannot yet express in our speech. The more we stand in awe of humans in opposition to justice, the more do we neglect God in the defense of justice,

But the Lord provides a suitable remedy for this wound when he says: *Whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.* But you see how people now tell themselves, 'We are not ashamed of the Lord and of his words since we acknowledge him openly.' I answer such people by saying that among Christians there are some who confess Christ because they realize that everyone is a Christian. If Christ's name were not held in such respect today the Church would not hold so many who profess him.[6*] An outward profession, which the general profession of belief keeps from being an embarrassment, is not a sufficient proof of faith.

But there is a way by which each of us may ask himself whether his confession of Christ is genuine, whether he is no longer ashamed of his name, whether his inner strength has fully overcome human respect. During times of persecution the faithful could be shamed, stripped of their property, expelled from positions of honor, mistreated; but in times of peace, because we have no persecutors to do these things to us, we have something else that can reveal us to ourselves. We are often afraid of being despised by our neighbors, we are too proud to bear verbal abuse, and if a quarrel arises with a neighbor we are ashamed to be the first to give in. An unspiritual heart rejects humility while it is seeking glory during this life. So often a person who is angry with an opponent wants to be reconciled to him, but is ashamed to be the first to go and give in.

Let us reflect on what Truth did, to see how he rejects our wicked deeds. If we are the members of so great a Head, we should imitate the one to whom we are joined. What example does Paul, the great preacher, give us for our instruction? *We are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.*[7] You know that we have created a dissension between ourselves and God by sinning. Yet God has been the first to send his ambassadors to us, so that we, the ones who have sinned, who have been invited, may come to his peace. Let human pride be ashamed; let one who has not been the first to give in to his neighbor be put to confusion, when even God, whom we have offended, entreats us through the mediation of his ambassadors to be reconciled to himself after our sin.

But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God.[7*] In Scripture, dearly beloved, the kingdom of God does not always refer to a kingdom that is still to come; it sometimes refers to the Church present to us now. So it is written: *The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin.*[8] There will certainly be no causes of sin in that kingdom where the condemned are not admitted. We gather from this example that in this place it is the present Church that is called the 'kingdom of God'.

And since some of the disciples would still be alive in their bodies to see the Church of God built up and set in opposition to the glory of this world, they were given the consoling promise that *there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God.* But since the Lord was forming such great precepts concerning submission to death, why did he have to come unexpectedly to this promise? If we look carefully at this, we recognize how faithfully he is acting. He would promise something to his unformed disciples concerning this present life to establish

[7] 2 Co 5:20 [8] Mt 13:41

them more firmly in regard to the future. So the Land of Promise was promised to the Israelites when they were still to be liberated from the land of Egypt; they were won over by earthly promises, when they were to be called to heavenly gifts. And why? So that while there was something they could perceive close by, they might trust more firmly in what they could have heard of as still remote. If that unspiritual people had not received something little they would not have believed in anything great. By granting them earthly things almighty God won them over to what is heavenly; they would learn to hope for what they didn't see by getting what they could; they would become more stalwart with regard to invisible things the more the certainty of their hope was supported by the visible things promised them.[8*] So the psalmist was right to say that *He gave them the lands of the nations, and they took possession of the fruit of the peoples' toil, that thus they should keep his ordinances, and search out his laws.*[9]

Speaking here to his unformed disciples, Truth promised that they would see the kingdom of God on earth. This was to make them believe with more confidence that they would see it in heaven. And so, because of the kingdom which we now see raised up high in this world, let us hope in the kingdom we believe we will occupy in heaven. Some people bear the name Christian but haven't the Christian faith. They think only of what they can see; they don't desire what they can't see because they don't suppose it exists. We are standing around the bodies of the holy martyrs, my friends. Would they have given up their bodies to death unless they were absolutely convinced that there is a life for which they had to die? Those who believed in this way are famous for their miracles. The living who are sick come to their dead bodies and are healed; perjurers come and are harassed by demons; demoniacs come and are set free. How must they be living there where they live now, if they live in so many miracles here where they are dead!

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9. Ps 105:44–45 (V 104:44–45)

I will tell you something, my friends, something short but significant. I learned of it from some people who have been long in religious life. In the time of the Goths there was a married woman of good family, very religious, who used to come frequently to the church of these martyrs. On a certain day, when she had come to pray as her custom was, as she was leaving the church she saw two monks clothed as pilgrims. She believed them to be pilgrims, and ordered that they be given alms. Before the one who performed this service for her had approached to bestow the alms, they stood close to her and said: 'You are helping us now. On the day of judgment we will seek you out, and do whatever we can for you.' When they had said this, they were taken out of her sight. Frightened, she returned to her prayers, shedding more copious tears. After this she became more zealous in her prayers, as she was convinced of the promise.

If, in the words of Paul, *Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen,*[10] I am not now saying that you are to believe in the life to come: those who are alive in that life have been made visible to human sight.[9*] What we can see we do better to call 'known' than 'believed'. The Lord, who shows us even visibly those whom he has taken invisibly to live with himself, has wanted us to know rather than to believe in the life to come.

Dearly beloved, make these martyrs the defenders of your cause in your trial before the severe Judge. Have them plead for you on the dreadful day. If a case of yours was about to come before some great judge tomorrow, you would surely spend all of today in thought. All of you would be seeking an advocate; you would be earnestly begging him to plead for you before so important a judge. Jesus will come as a severe judge, and there will be dread of so great an assembly of angels and archangels. In that gathering our case will be examined—and yet we are not seeking defenders now to plead for us then! There are those present to plead

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10. Heb 11:1

for us, the holy martyrs. They want us to ask them; if I may put it this way, they seek to be sought. Seek them as helpers in your prayer, find them protectors in your guilt. Even the one who is Judge wants to be asked so that he won't have to punish sinners. For this reason he threatens us with his anger over so long a period of time, and yet waits for us with mercy. But let his mercy revive us without making us remiss. Let our sins trouble us without casting us into despair. Although we are fearful in our confidence, we also hope in our fear that we may come quickly to the eternal kingdom, through him who lives and reigns with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.

NOTES

1. Homily 32 in Migne (*PL* 1232). In the course of this homily, Gregory mentions several unnamed saints. This suggests that it was preached on their feast day, and possibly even in the church where their relics were preserved. The early manuscripts have the notation that these were two martyrs, Processus and Martinian, the anniversary of whose martyrdom was commemorated on July 2. But W specifies Mt 24:3-13 as the passage to be used for their feast day, and lists this pericope, Lk 9:23-27, as the one to be used for the feast day of an early Roman martyr, St. Nicomedes, observed on September 15. Bu simply has the notation that this pericope may be used for the liturgy on the feast day of any of the saints.
2. The latter part of this sentence is to be found both in Bede's *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 202, 1411/13) and in his *Commentary on Mark* (CC 120: 538, 1961/63). The eight following sentences are also in the *Commentary on Mark* (CC 120, 538, 1963/75), the final sentence occurring as well in the *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 202, 1413/17).
3. Eight sentences here were taken over by Bede for use in his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 202, 1417/28). The same eight, plus the additional ninth, were made use of in his *Commentary on Mark* (CC 120: 538, 1975 - 539, 1988
4. Six more sentences to be found both in Bede's *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 203, 1433/47) and in his *Commentary on Mark* (CC 120: 539, 1991/2007).
5. Six additional sentences adopted by Bede for both his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 203, 1447/59)—though the major portion of the third sentence is omitted in this *Commentary*—and in his *Commentary on Mark* (CC 120: 539, 2007-540, 20/23).

6. Also five sentences used by Bede for both his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 203, 1459/69) and in his *Commentary on Mark* (CC 120: 540, 2023/34).
7. The final half of this sentence, together with the following nine sentences, were taken over by Bede in his *Commentary on Mark* (CC 120: 540, 2037/50). The same part of Gregory's homily, minus the third last and last sentences, are also to be found in the *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 203, 1471 - 204, 1480).
8. Three more sentences used in the *Commentary on Mark* (CC 120: 540, 2050/55). Only the final section of the last sentence is in the *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 204, 1480/81).
9. There is a passage that is closely related to, though not identical with, this section of the homily in Gregory's *Dialogues* 4:5.

homily 33

One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and sat at table. And a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was sitting at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment and standing behind Jesus by his feet, she began to wet his feet with her tears and she wiped them with her hair and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment. But seeing this, the Pharisee who had invited him said to himself, If this man were a prophet he would certainly know who and what kind of woman is touching him and that she is a sinner. And Jesus answered, saying, 'Simon, I have something to say to you'. And he answered, 'What is it, teacher?' 'A certain creditor had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, the other fifty. When they could not pay, he forgave them both. Now which of them will love him more?' Simon answered, 'I suppose the one to whom he forgave more'. And he said to him, 'You have judged rightly'. Then, turning to the woman he said to Simon, 'Do you see this woman? I entered your house and you gave me no water for my feet. But she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I entered she has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. There I tell you, her many sins are forgiven her because she has loved much. But someone who is forgiven little loves little.' And he said to her, 'Your sins are forgiven.' At once those who were at the table with him complained, saying to themselves, Who is this who even forgives sins? And he said to the woman, 'Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.'

(Luke 7: 36–50)[1]*

When I think of Mary's repentance I am more disposed to weep than to speak. Whose heart is so stony that this sinful woman's tears wouldn't soften it with her example of repentance? Out of consideration for what she had done, she refused to moderate what she was doing. She came in while people were dining; she came uninvited; she poured out her tears while a feast was going on. Tell me what was the grief that consumed her that, she wasn't ashamed to weep even during a feast!

This woman, whom Luke calls a sinner, John names Mary.[1] I believe that she is the same Mary of whom Mark says that seven demons had been cast out.[2] How should we interpret the seven demons except as the totality of vices? Since all time is comprehended in seven days,[3] we correctly take the number seven to signify totality. Mary had seven demons since she was filled with the totality of vices. But you see that because she was aware of the stains of her disgrace she ran to the fountain of mercy to be washed clean. She was not ashamed before those who were dining. Since she felt such great shame inwardly, she did not believe that there was anything to be bashful about outwardly.

What astonishes us, my friends, Mary's coming, or the Lord's receiving her? Should I say that he received her, or that he drew her to himself? I had better say that he drew her and received her. Surely he drew her inwardly by his mercy, and received her outwardly by his gentleness. But as we've already run through the text of the Gospel, let us see the manner of her healing.

She brought an alabaster flask of ointment, and standing behind Jesus at his feet, she began to wet his feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment.[2*] It is evident, my friends, that a woman who had earlier been eager for actions which are not allowed had used the ointment as a scent for her own body. What she had earlier used disgracefully for herself she now laudably offered for the Lord. Her eyes had sought earthly things; now, chastising them through repentance, she wept. She had used her hair to beautify her face; now she used it to wipe away her tears. She had spoken proudly with her mouth, but in kissing the Lord's feet she fixed it to the footsteps of her Redeemer. She found as many things to sacrifice as she had had ways of offering pleasure. She converted the number of her faults into the number of virtues, so that she could serve God as completely in repentance as she had rejected him in sin.

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[1] Jn 12:3 [2] Mk 16:9 [3] cf. Gn 2:1-2

But on seeing this the Pharisee looked down on her. Censuring not only the sinful woman who had come in, but also the Lord who had received her, he said within himself: *If this man were a prophet, he would certainly know who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, that she is a sinner.* The Pharisee in his own house was truly proud, and deceitfully righteous.[3]* He censured the sick woman on account of her sickness, and he who also was sick, from the wound of self-exaltation, without knowing it, censured the physician for receiving her. The physician was there between two sick people; one of them kept her sound understanding in her fever, the other had lost his understanding of heart in the fever of his body. She wept over what she had done; but the Pharisee, elated by his spurious righteousness, underestimated the strength of his illness. In his sickness, he who did not realize that he too was far from being well, lost even his understanding.

But as I say these things, I am painfully aware that some who are of the same rank as I am, who have been entrusted with the priestly office, if they have done something which is outwardly though barely right, immediately look down on those under their authority, and slight the sinners among the laity. They will not show compassion to those who confess their sins, and like the Pharisee they disdain to be touched by a sinful woman. If this woman had approached the Pharisee's feet she would surely have been driven away. He would have believed that he was being defiled by another's sin, because her true righteousness did not touch him.

[4]*Hence when we see sinners we must always weep for ourselves first over their failure. Perhaps we have fallen in the same way; or we can fall, if we haven't yet. And if the judgment of the teaching office must always eradicate vices by the power of discipline, we must nevertheless make careful distinctions: we should be uncompromising about vice, but compassionate to human nature. If a sinner has to be punished, a neighbor has to be supported. When he has nullified what he has done by his repentance, our neighbor is no longer a sinner. With the righteousness of God he turns against himself, and what the divine righteousness reproves he punishes in himself.

But let us now listen to the grounds on which the proud and arrogant man is found guilty.[5]* He is presented with the example of two debtors. One owes less, the other more. When both have had their debts forgiven, he is asked which of them has more love for the person who forgave them? He answers immediately that the one who was forgiven more loves more.[6]* We must note here that when the Pharisee is convicted by his own admission, he is like a madman carrying the rope with which he can be bound.

The sinful woman's good deeds are recounted for him, and the wicked deeds of the counterfeit righteous man: *I entered your house, you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment.* After this account there follows: *Therefore I tell you, her many sins are forgiven her because she has loved much.* What, my friends, do we think love is if not fire? And what is sin if not rust? Hence it is said that *many sins are forgiven her because she has loved much.* This means, She has completely burned away the rust of sin because she is mightily aflame with the fire of love. The more the heart of a sinner is consumed by the fire of love, the more fully is the rust of sin consumed.

You see that she who came to the physician sick was healed, but there were others who remained sick with respect to her health. At once those who were at table with him complained, saying within themselves, *Who is this who even forgives sins?*[7]* But the heavenly physician did not turn his attention to those sick persons he saw were becoming worse from his medicine. He encouraged her he had healed by referring to her confidence in him, saying, *Your faith has saved you; go in peace.* Her faith had indeed saved her. She did not doubt that she could receive what she asked for; but she had already received the definite assurance of hope from him whom she was also asking for healing through hope. She was ordered to go in peace, so that she would no longer be diverted from the road of truth down the way of scandal. So it was said by Zechariah: *To guide our feet into the way of peace.*[4] We guide our steps in the way of peace when, through our actions, we make our way down that road in which we are not opposed to the grace of our Creator.

Dearly beloved, I have completed my literal explanation of this story. Now let me give a mystical interpretation of what has been said, if that seems good. [8]*Whom does the Pharisee, who relies on his spurious righteousness, represent but the Jewish people? And whom the sinful woman, coming to the Lord's feet and weeping there, except the Gentiles who have been converted? She came with an alabaster flask, she poured out the ointment, she stood behind him at his feet, she wet his feet with her tears, she wiped with her hair the feet she had moistened, and she did not cease to kiss the feet she had wiped. That woman represented us, if we return to the Lord wholeheartedly after we have sinned, if we imitate the distress of her repentance.

And what is indicated by the ointment except the aroma of a good reputation?[9]* So Paul says, *We are the aroma of Christ to God everywhere.*[5] If then we do what we ought to do, by spreading the aroma of a good reputation throughout the Church, what are we doing except pouring out ointment on the Lord's body? And the woman stood at his feet. We have stood over against his feet when we were in a state of sin and resisting his ways. If we turn to him in true repentance after we have sinned, we are standing behind Jesus at his feet, since we are following in the footsteps of him we opposed. The woman wet his feet with her tears. We too do this in actuality if we are moved by compassion toward any of the Lord's lowliest members, if we are compassionate to his holy ones in their tribulations, if we consider their sorrows our own.

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[4] Lk 1:79 [5] 2 Co 2:14-15

The woman wiped with her hair the feet she had wet with her tears. Now hair is superfluous to the body. What do overflowing earthly possessions resemble if not hair? It is superfluous, and there is no sensation when it is cut off. We wipe the Lord's feet with our hair when we show mercy to his saints, on whom we have compassion out of love, with the things we have in superfluity. Through compassion our hearts suffer in such a way that our generous hands too give evidence of their sorrow. A person who has some measure of compassion for the sorrows of his neighbors, but fails to show them mercy from his superfluity, wets his Redeemer's feet with his tears, but without wiping them with his hair. He weeps, but omits to wipe them dry, who provides words of sorrow indeed, but does not cut off the impact of the sorrow by offering what the others need.

The woman kissed the feet she was wiping. We too do this to the full extent if we eagerly love those we are embracing with our generosity. Then our neighbor's need does not weigh heavily on us, his poverty which we are relieving does not become burdensome, and our hearts do not grow numb from lack of love as our hands meet his needs.

We can also understand by his feet the mystery of his incarnation, by which his divinity touched earth because he took a body to himself. *For the Word became flesh and dwelt* *among us.*[6] We kiss our Redeemer's feet when we love the mystery of his incarnation with our whole heart. We anoint his feet with ointment when we preach the power of his humanity by the good repute of our holy speech.

The Pharisee saw this and was envious, because when the Jews saw the Gentiles preaching God they were consumed by their own malice. Our Redeemer recounted this woman's actions as if they were the good deeds of the Gentiles, so that the Jews might recognize their evil state. The Pharisee was rebuked so that faithless people might be exposed through him. *I entered your house, you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears.* Water is outside of us, but our tears are within. The unfaithful people never bestowed the things outside themselves for the Lord's sake, but the Gentiles, when they had been converted, poured out for him not only their possessions but even their blood.

You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. The kiss is love's sign. The faithless people gave God no kiss; they were unwilling to love from their hearts him whom they served from fear. The Gentiles who were called did not cease kissing their Redeemer's feet, because they longed for him with uninterrupted love. Hence the Bride in the Song of Songs said of this same Redeemer: *Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth.*[7] It is fitting that she desires her Creator's kiss, as she makes herself ready through her love to obey him.

You did not anoint my head with oil. If we take the Lord's feet to be the mystery of his incarnation, we can appropriately take his head to represent his divinity. So Paul says, *The head of Christ is God.*[8] The Jews professed their belief in God, but not in him as a human person. The Pharisee was told, *You did not anoint my head with oil,* because the Jews omitted to preach the power of the divinity, in which they had bound themselves to believe, with due praise. *But she*

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[6] Jn 1:14 [7] Sg 1:1 [8] 1 Co 11:3

has anointed my feet with ointment, because when the Gentiles believed in the mystery of his incarnation, they preached his lowliness too with highest praise. He adds the sentence, *Therefore I tell you, her many sins are forgiven her because she has loved much,* as if to say, Although what is being consumed is extremely hard, yet the fire of love is strong enough to destroy even hard things.

While on this subject, I am inclined to reflect on the attention paid such great devotion, on the esteem in which Truth himself held the works of this woman, a sinner, but a repentant one. He recounted them to her antagonist in great detail. The Lord sat at the Pharisee's table, but he took pleasure in the feast of the heart provided by the repentant woman. In the Pharisee's company Truth was fed externally, but he received internal nourishment with the woman, the converted sinner. Hence in the Song of Songs holy Church says to the One she is seeking under the figure of a young stag,[9] *Tell me, you whom my soul loves, where you pasture, where you lie down at noon.*[10] The Lord is referred to as a young stag, an offspring of deer, because of the flesh he assumed as a son of the ancient fathers. Heat increases at noon, and the young stag seeks a shady place not affected by the heat. The Lord rests in hearts not on fire with love of the present age, which are not burnt up by unspiritual desires, and which, if they are on fire, are not dried up by their anxious desires in this world. So it was said to Mary: *The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.*[11] The young stag seeks shady places at noon in which to feed, because the Lord is fed by hearts which are not burnt by their physical desires; they have taken refuge in moderating grace. The repentant woman gave the Lord more nourishment interiorly than the Pharisee did exteriorly, since our Redeemer, like a young stag, had fled the heat of what is unspiritual to her heart, which the shadow of repentance had tempered after the fire of her vices.

[9] Sg 2:9 [10] Sg 1:7 (V 1:6) [11] Lk 1:35

Let us consider what a sign of love it was, that he not only allowed the sinful woman to come into his presence, but even allowed her to touch his feet. Let us contemplate the grace of our merciful God, and let us condemn the plenitude of our guilt. He sees sinners, and bears with them; he puts up with those who resist him, and still calls gently to them daily through the Gospel. He desires our confession from a pure heart, and forgives every fault we have committed. Our Redeemer's mercy has mitigated for us the rigor of the Law. It is written there, If anyone does this or does that, he shall be put to death; if he does these things or those, he shall be buried under stones.[12] Our Creator appeared in the flesh, he promised not punishment for the confession of sins but life. He received a woman admitting her wounds, and sent her away healed. He altered the Law's harshness in the direction of mercy, and he mercifully set free those it justly condemned.

It was accurately written in the Law that *the hands of Moses were heavy, so they took a stone and placed it for him to sit on, and Aaron and Hur held up his hands.*[13] Moses sat on the stone when the Law rested on the Church. But this Law had heavy hands, because it did not deal mercifully with those who were sinners, but treated them with extreme harshness. 'Aaron' means 'mountain of strength,' and 'Hur' means 'fire'.[10*] Who is meant by 'mountain of strength' but our Redeemer, of whom the prophet said: *It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains.*[14] And who is prefigured by 'fire' but the Holy Spirit, of whom our Redeemer said: *I have come to cast fire upon the earth.*[15] Aaron and Hur support the heavy hands of Moses, and make them lighter by their support, because the *Mediator between God and men,*[16] coming with the fire of the Holy Spirit, revealed that the heavy commandments of the Law, which cannot

[12] Ex 19:12; Lv 20:2,27
[13] Ex 17:12
[14] Is 2:2
[15] Lk 12:49
[16] 1 Tm 2:5

be borne when they are taken literally, become more tolerable for us when they are understood spiritually. It is as if he made the hands of Moses light when he changed the weight of the Law's commandments into the strength that comes from confession.

He intimated to us this promise of the mercy to come when he said through the prophet: *I do not will the death of a sinner, but that he be converted and live.*[17] Again, it is said to every sinful soul under the figure of Judea: *If a man divorces his wife, and she leaves him and marries another man, will he return to her again? Will not that woman be polluted and defiled? You have prostituted yourself with many lovers: yet return to me, says the Lord.*[18] You see how he has given us the example of an infamous woman, and showed that after her infamy she cannot be taken back. But in his mercy he goes beyond this example he produced when he says that though the prostituted woman could not possibly be taken back, yet he himself awaits the prostituted soul, so that he can take it back. My friends, consider the import of such great love. He tells us of something that cannot be done, and reveals that he himself can do it, even against the custom. He calls, and even seeks to embrace, those he declares to be defiled; he complains that they have deserted him.

Let no one squander this period of great mercy; let no one cast away the medicine of love which has been offered him. The divine bounty calls us back when we have turned away, and prepares an indulgent reception for us when we return. Let each of us consider, then, the obligation that binds him, when God awaits him, and is not vexed even when he has been rejected. Let the one who wouldn't remain, return; let the one who refused to stand at least rise up after his fall. Our Creator teaches us how great is the love with which he awaits us when he says through the prophet: *I have given heed and listened, but no one has spoken what is good; there is no one who reconsiders in his heart and says, What have I done?*[19] We ought never to have considered evil things. But since we were unwilling to consider as we should, you see how he still bears with us in order that we may reconsider. Look at the great kindness of his reception, consider his merciful heart which is open to us. He is seeking those reconsidering in the right way, whom he lost when they were considering wrongly.

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[17] Ezk 33:11 [18] Jr 3:1 [19] Jr 8:6

Dearly beloved, bring back to your mind's eye, bring before you the repentant sinful woman as an example for you to imitate. Weep bitterly for the misdeeds you remember you committed in your youth and young adulthood, wipe away with your tears the stains of your accustomed habits and deeds. Let us now love the steps of our Redeemer, which we slighted by sinning. See how, as I have told you, the heart of divine love is open to receive us, and does not despise our life which has been stained by sin. The thing that makes us draw back in horror at our defilement lets us already see the possibility of interior cleanness. The Lord gently embraces us as we return, because the life of sinners, which is washed by tears, can no longer be unworthy in his sight. In Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with God the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. Amen.

19. Jr 8:6

NOTES

1. Homily 33 in Migne (*PL* 1239). Neither in the text of the homily itself nor in any of the early Gospel books is there any indication of the occasion on which this homily was preached. Only in Bu is there any notation beside Lk 7:36, and that simply specifies that this Gospel pericope can be read at any daily eucharistic celebration (*cottidiana*).
2. Seven sentences found in Bede's *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 167, 55/65).
3. Two sentences used by Bede in his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 167, 67/71).
4. Three sentences taken over by Bede for his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 167, 71 - 168, 77).
5. Another single sentence adopted by Bede in the *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 168, 77/78).
6. Eleven sentences added to the above by Bede in the *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120, 168, 83/98).

7. Five more sentences which Bede has used in the *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 168, 100/108).
8. Two more sentences inserted by Bede in his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 168, 110/113)
9. The remaining part of this long section, except for four sentences toward the middle and the two sentences at the end of the paragraph, is all to be found in Bede's *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 169, 140 - 170, 194).
10. Two quotations taken from Saint Jerome's *Interpretation of Hebrew Names* (CC 72: 73, 6; 77, 5).

homily 34

> *Then the publicans and sinners drew near to him to hear him. And the Pharisees and scribes muttered saying, This man receives sinners and eats with them. And he spoke this parable to them, saying: 'Which of you who has a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them does not leave the ninety-nine in the desert and go after the one which is lost? And when he has found the sheep, he lays it on his shoulders rejoicing. And coming home, he calls together his friends and neighbors saying, Rejoice with me, because I have found the sheep that was lost. I tell you, such will be the joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, more than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and turn over the house and seek diligently until she finds the coin she has lost? And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and her neighbors, saying, Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin which I had lost. There will be joy in the presence of God over one sinner who repents.'*
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> (Luke 15:1-10)[1]*

Summer, which is a very hard time for me physically, has brought about a long interruption to my explanations of the gospel. But my love has not ceased because my voice has been silent. What I'm saying is something that each of you knows within himself. Love is often impeded by other concerns; it glows undiminished in the heart, even though our actions do not show it. When the sun is covered with clouds, we do not see it on earth, but it is still burning in the sky. So too with love: it is busily employed, and its heat produces energy within us, but is not revealed outwardly in the flames of activity. But since the time for speaking has now returned, your enthusiasm is stirring me up, so that I am disposed to speak at greater length as your hearts more eagerly await my words.

You've heard in the Gospel reading, my friends, that sinners and tax collectors drew near our Redeemer, and he received them, not only to converse with them, but even to eat with them.[2*] When the Pharisees saw this they were scornful of him. You should conclude from this that true righteousness has compassion, but false righteousness scorn—though even the righteous are apt to be justly indignant with sinners. But what is done as a result of pride is one thing, and what is done out of zeal for discipline is another. The righteous show scorn without being scornful; they despair without despairing; they stir up hostility, but they do it out of love, because even though outwardly they heap up rebukes for the sake of discipline, inwardly they preserve their kindly feelings through their love. Often in their own minds they put those they are correcting ahead of themselves, and consider those they are judging better than themselves. In doing this the discipline they administer shows their concern for those subject to them, and their humility shows their concern for themselves.

On the other hand, those who are used to feeling proud because of their false righteousness look down on every one else. They show no mercy to the weak, and they become worse sinners to the extent that they believe they are not sinners. Among these were the Pharisees who passed judgment on the Lord because he received sinners, and found fault with the fountain of mercy from their dried-up hearts.

They were so sick that they did not know that they were sick.[3*] To help them recognize their state, the heavenly physician healed them with soothing lotions. He gave them an appealing example, and reduced the swelling of the wound in their hearts. He asked them, *Which one of you, who has a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them does not leave the ninety-nine in the desert and go after the one which is lost?*

See the wonderful way in which Truth has given a parable of devotion. Human beings can recognize it in their own case, and yet it pertains in a special way to humanity's Creator himself. Because one hundred is a perfect number, he himself possessed a hundred sheep when he created the substance of angels and humans. But one sheep was lost when a human left the pasture of life by sinning. He left the ninety-nine in the desert, since he left the majestic choirs of angels in heaven. But why is heaven called a desert, unless it is because we call what we have left behind deserted? A human deserted heaven when he sinned; the ninety-nine sheep remained in the desert when the Lord was seeking the one on earth, because the number of thinking beings, of angels and humans, which had been created in order to see God, was diminished when the human was lost. The human who had been lost was sought on earth, in order that the perfect sum of the sheep might be restored in heaven. Here the evangelist says *in the desert,* but another evangelist says *in the mountains* to indicate the heights, since the sheep which had not been lost were standing on the summits.[1]

And when he has found the sheep, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. He laid the sheep on his shoulders because when he took on our human nature he himself bore our sins.[2]

4**And coming home he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, Rejoice with me, because I have found the sheep that was lost.* When he has found the sheep, he returns home. Our Shepherd returned to his heavenly kingdom once humanity had been restored. There he found his friends and neighbors, those choirs of angels which are his friends because they keep his will unceasingly by their steadfastness, and which are also his neighbors, because by their constant presence they have perfect joy in seeing his glory. We must notice that he does not say, 'Rejoice with the sheep that has been found,' but *Rejoice with me.* Our lives are his joy. When we are brought back to heaven, we complete the solemn festival of his delight.

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[1] Mt 18:12 [2] Is 53:11; 1 P 2:24

I tell you that such will be the joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, more than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. We must consider, my friends, why the Lord says that there is more joy in heaven over converted sinners than over the righteous who have stood firm. Is it not what we realize from the daily experience of what we see, that often those who know that no burden of sin oppresses them do indeed stand firm in the path of righteousness, they do nothing which is not allowed—but even so they are not filled with eager longing for their heavenly homeland. They allow themselves the use of what is allowable in proportion as they remember that they have done nothing forbidden. Frequently they are slow to perform anything outstandingly good, since they are perfectly untroubled in their own minds about not having committed any serious evils.

On the other hand, sometimes those who remember that they have done something forbidden feel the stings of conscience, and their very sorrow sets them on fire with the love of God. They exercise themselves in extraordinary virtues. They are eager for all the difficulties of the holy contest, they abandon everything of this world, they flee honors, they rejoice at the abuse they receive, they are inflamed by desire, and long with great eagerness for their heavenly homeland. Because they are aware that they have strayed away from God, they compensate by later gains for their earlier losses.

And so there is more joy in heaven over a converted sinner than over a righteous person standing firm. A leader in battle has more love for a soldier who returns after fleeing, and who valiantly pursues the enemy, than for one who never turned back, but who never acted valiantly either. A farmer has greater love for land which bears fruitfully after he has cleared it of thorns, than for land which never had thorns but which never yielded a fruitful harvest.

[5]*Even though this is so, we must be certain that there are many righteous people in whose lives there is so much joy that it is not possible that any repentance of sinners could surpass them. Many are aware of no evils in themselves, yet they give themselves eagerly to suffering as if they were bound by every kind of sin. They reject every lawful thing, they prepare themselves sublimely for the world's scorn, they don't want to be allowed anything that gives pleasure, they cut themselves off even from the good things allowed them, they despise all visible things and are on fire for what is invisible, they rejoice in weeping, they humble themselves in every way, and they grieve over their sins of thought as others do over their sinful actions. What should I say of those who humble themselves in repentance over their sins of thought, and who remain always upright in their actions, except that they are righteous and repentant too? We must infer from this how much joy it causes God when a righteous person humbly bemoans himself, if it causes joy in heaven when an unrighteous one condemns by his repentance what he has wrongfully done.

Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and turn over the house and seek diligently until she finds the coin she has lost? The shepherd and the woman have the same significance: God himself, and the Wisdom of God. And because a coin bears an image, the woman lost a silver coin when a human being, created in God's image, withdrew from the likeness of his Creator by sinning. The woman lights a lamp because God's wisdom appeared in a human nature. A lamp is light in a clay vessel, and light in a clay vessel is divinity in a human body. Wisdom himself says of this clay vessel of his body: *My strength is dried up like a clay vessel.*[3] A clay vessel becomes firm in fire; his strength was dried up like a clay vessel, because by the agony of his passion he made the body he had assumed strong for the glory of his resurrection.

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3. Ps 22:15 (V 21:16)

After the lamp was lit she turns over the house, because as soon as his divinity began to shine out through his body our whole consciousness was troubled. A house is turned over when a human conscience is troubled by consideration of its guilt. This word, 'turns over', does not differ from 'cleansed', [6*]which is read in other manuscripts, since unless a perverted heart is first turned over by fear it is not cleansed from its deep-rooted vices. When the house has been turned over the coin is found, because when a person's conscience is troubled, the likeness to his Creator is restored in him.

And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin which I had lost. Who are her friends and neighbors unless they are the heavenly powers mentioned above? They are close to supernal Wisdom in proportion as they draw near to him through the gift of uninterrupted vision.

While I am on this subject, I mustn't carelessly omit to ask why the woman who signifies God's Wisdom had ten silver coins, of which she lost one, which she found when she sought it. The Lord created the essential nature of angels and humans so that they might come to know himself. Since he intended it to last forever, beyond any doubt he created it in his own likeness. The woman had ten silver coins since there are nine ranks of angels, but that the number of the elect might be complete humanity was created as a tenth. Humanity was not lost by its Creator after its sin, because eternal Wisdom, shining by his physical miracles with the light of the clay vessel, restored it.

I spoke of nine ranks of angels. We know from sacred Scripture that there are angels, archangels, virtues, powers, principalities, dominations, thrones, cherubim and seraphim. Nearly every page of Scripture testifies to the existence of angels and archangels. The books of the prophets, as we know, speak of cherubim and seraphim. Paul lists the names of four ranks when he says to the Ephesians: *Far above all principality and power and virtue and* *domination.*[4] Writing to the Colossians he says: *Whether thrones or dominations or principalities or powers.*[5] He had already mentioned the dominations, principalities and powers to the Ephesians, but when he was going to list them for the Colossians as well he put in first place the thrones, whom he had not mentioned to the Ephesians. When we add thrones to the four ranks he listed for the Ephesians, that is, principalities, powers, virtues and dominations, we have five ranks he has particularly mentioned. When we add angels and archangels, cherubim and seraphim to these, we find nine ranks of angels.

The angel which was first created was told by the prophet, *You were the seal of likeness, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty; you were among the delights of God's garden.*[6] We should notice that it is not said to have been made in the likeness of God, but as *the seal of likeness,* since as its essential nature is finer, it is suggested that God's image is expressed with greater likeness in it. The prophet immediately adds: *Every precious stone was your covering, carnelian, topaz, and jasper, chrysolite, onyx and beryl, sapphire, carbuncle and emerald.* He gave the names of nine stones, since there are nine ranks of angels. The first angel was adorned and covered with these nine since when it was set ahead of the whole multitude of angels, it was more illustrious in comparison with them.

Why have I briefly listed these choirs of steadfast angels, if I am not also to comment more specifically on their functions? In Greek, angels are 'messengers', and archangels are the most important messengers. We should know too that the word 'angel' is the name of a service, not of a nature. The holy spirits of our heavenly homeland are always indeed spirits, but they cannot always be called angels since they are only angels when some message is communicated by them. So the psalmist says, *He makes his spirits angels,*[7] as if to say plainly, He who always possesses them as spirits, makes them angels when he wishes.

4. Eph 1:21 5. Col 1:16 6. Ezk 28:12-13 7. Ps 104:4 (V 103:4)

Those that communicate relatively unimportant messages are called angels, and those that communicate the most important are called archangels. That is why it was not just any angel, but the archangel Gabriel, that was sent to the virgin Mary.[8] It was fitting that a most important angel come on this mission, to communicate the most important message of all.

[7]*Archangels are distinguished by personal names to indicate by the word the service they are able to perform. In the heavenly city, where the fullness of knowledge is perfected by the vision of almighty God, they do not receive personal names because their individual persons cannot be known without names; when they come to us to fulfill some function they take the names by which they are known among us from their functions. Michael means 'Who is like God?';[8]* Gabriel means 'The strength of God';[9]* Raphael means 'The healing of God'.[10]*

As often as something requiring wonderful courage is to be done, Michael is said to be sent. We are to understand from the very action and name that no one can do what is possible to God. The ancient enemy, who in his pride desired to be like God, said, *I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of heaven I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of the testament in the recesses of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.*[9] At the end of the world, when he is left to his own strength, he is to be destroyed by a most dreadful punishment when he does battle with the archangel Michael. So John tells us that *war broke out with Michael the archangel,*[10] so that the one who proudly elevated himself to likeness to God may learn, after he has been destroyed by Michael, that no one can rise to likeness to God by pride.

[11]*To Mary, Gabriel, who is named 'The strength of God,' was sent.[11] He came to announce the one who deigned to appear in humility to vanquish the powers of the air. Of

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[8] Lk 1:26–27 [9] Is 14:13–14 [10] Rv 12:7 [11] Lk 1:26–27

him the psalmist says: *Lift up your gates, you rulers, and be raised up, you everlasting gates, and the King of glory will enter. Who is the King of glory? The Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord, mighty in battle.*[12] And again, *The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory.*[13] By 'The strength of God' was the Lord of hosts to be announced, he who came, mighty in battle, against the powers of the air.

Raphael is interpreted 'The healing of God,' as I have said, because when he touched Tobit's eyes as if in performance of a healing service, he wiped away the darkness of his blindness. One who was sent to heal deserves to be called 'The healing of God'.[14]

Since I've spoken briefly of the angels by interpreting their names, I must still say something concise concerning the words we use to indicate their duties. We call Virtues those spirits who bring about signs and wonders with some frequency. Powers are those who have received this duty more powerfully in their rank than others have, so that the opposing virtues are subjected to their authority; by their power they restrain them, so that they are not able to tempt the hearts of humans as much as they would like. Principalities are those who preside over the good angelic spirits. When they arrange whatever must be done by those under their authority, they rule them in carrying out the divine ministries. Dominations greatly transcend the powers and principalities. Those bands of angels which are preeminent because of their wonderful power are called Dominations because the others are subject to them in obedience. Those bands over which almighty God always presides in carrying out his judgment are called Thrones. Since in Latin we speak of seats as thrones, we call God's Thrones those who are so filled with the grace of his divinity that the Lord may sit upon them, and make his judgments through them. Hence the psalmist says: *You who give righteous judgment sit upon a throne.*[15] 'Cherubim' means 'fullness of knowledge'.

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12. Ps 24:7-8 (V 23:7-8)
13. Ps 24:10 (V 23:10)
14. Tb 11:13-15
15. Ps 10:4 (V 9:5)

These higher bands are called Cherubim because they are so filled with perfect knowledge that they contemplate God's glory from closer by. According to the nature of created beings, they know everything more fully the closer they draw to the sight of their Creator, as their dignity deserves. Those bands of holy spirits are called Seraphim who, because of their unique nearness to their Creator, burn with an incomparable love for him. For those who are on fire, or who enkindle others, are called Seraphim.[12*] Since they are so closely joined to God that no other spirits come between them, they burn more fiercely as they see him more closely. Their love is a flame, because the more spiritually they behold the glory of his divinity, the more vehemently are they aflame with his love.

But what good does it do to speak briefly of these angelic spirits, if we are not zealous to turn them to our profit by appropriate reflection on what we have said. The heavenly city is made up of angels and human beings. We believe that as many of the human race ascend to there, as there were chosen angels who happened to remain there. As Scripture says, *He fixed the bounds of the peoples according to the number of the angels of God.*[16] We must draw something from these distinctions among our fellow citizens of heaven to apply to our own way of life, and rouse ourselves to increase in virtue by their devotion. Since we believe that the multitude of humans that is going to ascend there is equal to the multitude of angels that never left, it remains for those humans who are returning to their heavenly homeland to imitate some of the characteristics of these bands of angels, in the process of their return.

Clearly there are different ways of human life that correspond to the ranks of the bands of angels. By a resemblance to their ways, they share in the condition of each. There are many who are gifted with little, but who do not leave off devotedly making this little known to their brothers

16. Dt 32:8

and sisters. These make their way among the number of the angels. And there are some who have been renewed by the gift of divine bounty, and who are able to take in and proclaim the most important heavenly secrets. Where do we reckon them except among the number of the archangels? And there are others who work miracles and perform powerful signs. Where do they fit in except among the portion and number of the supernal Virtues? And there are some who chase evil spirits from the bodies of the possessed, casting them out by the strength of their prayers and the power they have been given. Where do they deserve to be except among the number of heavenly Powers? And there are some who have received virtues surpassing the merits even of the elect, and since they are superior even to the good, they rule over these elect brothers and sisters. Where have they received their portion except among the number of the Principalities? And some have so dominated all the vices and desires in themselves that by virtue of their purity they are called gods in the midst of human beings. Thus Moses was told, *See, I make you as God to Pharaoh.*[17] Where do these make their way except among the Dominations? And some have achieved dominion over themselves by their constant watchfulness, subduing themselves by constant mindfulness and remaining always in holy fear: they receive this gift, among other virtues, that they are able to exercise right judgment even over others. When divine contemplation is present in their minds, the Lord governs in them as from his throne, examining the deeds of others and wonderfully disposing everything from his seat. What are these but Thrones of their Creator, and where are we to assign them except among the number of the supernal seats. When they rule the Church, often they judge even the elect with respect to some of their imperfect actions.

And some are so filled with love for God and their neighbor that we correctly call them Cherubim. As I have already said, 'Cherubim' means 'fullness of knowledge,' and from Paul we have learned that *love is the fullness of the law.*[18] All who are filled beyond the rest with love of God and of their neighbor receive the place they deserve among the number of Cherubim.

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[17] Ex 7:1

And some are set on fire by supernal contemplation, and are filled with eager desire for their Creator alone. They no longer long for anything in this world, they are nourished by love for eternity alone, they thrust aside all earthly things; their hearts transcend every temporal thing; they love, they are on fire, they find rest in this fire; loving sets them on fire, and they enkindle others too by their speech: those they touch with their words they instantly set on fire with love of God. What then should I call these people whose hearts, which have been turned into fire, are shining and burning, but Seraphim? They enlighten the heart's eyes with regard to things on high, and purify them of the rust of vices by tearful compunction. Where do these who burn so brightly with love for their Creator receive their calling's portion except among the number of the Seraphim?

But while I am speaking about these things, dearly beloved, turn inward toward yourselves. Examine your deserts and your inmost thoughts. As you go over them in your minds, see if you are doing anything good, if you find among the number of those bands which I have briefly considered the portion to which you are called. It will go hard with the heart that recognizes within itself little of these good things I have recounted, and harder still if it understands that it lacks these gifts, and fails to deplore it.

We must weep for anyone of this kind, my friends, because he does not weep for himself. Let us consider the gifts the elect have received, and let us desire with all the strength we can muster the love of so great a portion. Let one who recognizes within himself very little of the grace of these gifts deplore his lack, and let one who perceives in himself smaller gifts not envy others their greater ones. The divine distinctions among the blessed spirits have been so established that some shall be higher than others.

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[18] Rm 13:10

It is related that Denys the Areopagite, an ancient and venerable father, says that those who are sent forth, either visibly or invisibly, to carry out some function, are from among the lesser bands of angels, because either angels or archangels come to give comfort to human beings. The higher bands never withdraw from God, since those which are pre-eminent never have any external function.[13*] To this Isaiah appears to be opposed: *One of the Seraphim flew toward me, having in his hand a piece of charcoal which he had taken with tongs from the altar, and he touched my mouth.*[19] But the prophet wishes us to understand that those spirits which are sent receive a name indicative of their service. Since the angel carried a burning coal from the altar to burn away sins of speech, it is called a Seraphim, because the name indicates burning. I believe that Daniel's words agree with this: *A thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times a hundred thousand stood before him.*[20] It is one thing to minister, another to stand before someone. They minister to God who go forth to proclaim something to us; they stand before him who have perfect enjoyment of their intimate contemplation, and so are not sent forth to perform actions.

We have learned from certain places in Scripture that some things are done by Cherubim and some by Seraphim. Because I have no clear proof, I am unwilling to affirm whether they do these things themselves, or accomplish them through bands of angels under their authority, their names, which are greater, being used because the things are done on their authority. But I am certain of this, that to carry out some duty from on high some spirits send others. The prophet Zechariah is our witness: *See,* he says, *the angel who talked with me came forward, and another angel came forward to meet him, and said to him: Run and speak to that boy, saying:*

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[19] Is 6:6–7 [20] Dn 7:10

Jerusalem shall be inhabited without a wall.[21] When one angel says to another, *Run and speak,* there is no doubt that one is sending the other. The lesser ranks are sent, the greater ones do the sending.

But we hold this as certain about the bands that are sent, that even when they come to us, they so carry out their external function that they are never interiorly absent from God, by reason of their contemplation.[14*] They are sent, and they stand in God's presence, both. Angelic spirits are limited, but the supreme Spirit, God himself, is not. Even the angels he sends out are still in his presence, because wherever they may come after being sent, they are moving about in his presence.

We should know that often the ranks of blessed spirits receive the names of the ranks next to them. I have said that the thrones, God's seats, are a special rank of blessed spirits, yet the psalmist says, *You who sit upon the cherubim, show yourself.*[22] When in distinguishing the bands the cherubim are joined with the thrones, the Lord is described as sitting upon the cherubim too, from that fact that they are equal to the next band.

In the supreme city, special qualities so belong to individuals as in some way to belong to all; what one has in part is possessed in its totality by another rank. They are not included under the same name because the rank which has received something more fully in its service has to be called by the particular name that belongs to that thing.

'I have said that the seraphim are called flame,' and yet all the ranks are on fire together with love for their Creator. 'Cherubim' means 'fullness of knowledge,' and yet who is ignorant there of anything, where they all together see God, the very Source of knowledge? Thrones are so called from the fact that their Creator directs them, but who can be happy unless his Creator directs his heart? Therefore the qualities that are held partially by all have been given as

[21] Zc 2:3–4 [22] Ps 80:1 (V 79:2)

a particular name to those who have received them more fully as their service. For even if some there possess certain qualities in a way that others cannot possess them, as Dominations and Principalities are called by a special name, everything there is the possession of all, because through the love of the Spirit these qualities are possessed by each in the others.

But see, while I have been laying open the secrets of the heavenly citizens, I have digressed far from my orderly explanation. Therefore let us yearn for those of whom I have been speaking, but let us return to ourselves. We must remember that we are beings with a body. Let us be silent about the secrets of heaven, and cleanse the stains our Creator sees on our dust by the hand of repentance. Divine Mercy itself gives us a promise saying, *There will be joy in heaven over one sinner who repents;* yet the Lord says by the prophet that on whatever day a righteous person sins, *None of his righteous deeds will be remembered*[23] by him.

Let us consider, if we can, the plan of divine love. God threatens punishment to those who are standing if they fall, but he promises mercy to the fallen if they try to rise. He puts the former in fear lest they presume upon their good deeds, and encourages the latter lest they lose hope because of their evil deeds. If you are righteous, fear his wrath lest you slip; if you are a sinner, believe in his mercy so that you can arise. But see, we have already fallen, we are not strong enough to stand, we lie prostrate in our evil desires. He who created us to be upright still waits, and he appeals to us to rise. He opens up his heart of love, and seeks to get us back to himself again through repentance.

But we cannot repent worthily unless we know how to do it.[15*] Repentance means both bewailing the evil deeds we have committed, and not committing again what we have bewailed. A person who weeps bitterly over some things, in such a way as still to commit others, either does not know how to repent, or is just pretending to do so. What good does it do to weep over sins of dissipation, and to continue to experience the passion of avarice? Or what good is it to grieve over sins of anger, and still to be consumed by fires of envy?

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[23] Ezk 33:13

I'm not saying very much when I say that a person who weeps over his sins does not in the least degree commit what he weeps over, and that a person who bewails his vices is afraid to commit them again. We must reflect seriously that one who remembers having committed unlawful actions must strive to refrain even from some that are lawful, since he makes satisfaction to his Creator in this way. A person who has committed things that are prohibited should cut off from himself even what is allowed, and reproach himself in the smallest things as he remembers that he has sinned in the greatest.

What I am saying would be excessive if I did not substantiate it by the testimony of sacred Scripture. Old Testament law forbids anyone to lust after another man's wife,[24] but it does not decree punishment for the king who commands his soldiers to perform dangerous feats, or who desires a drink of water. We all know that David was pricked by lust, and desired another man's wife, and took her.[25] The blows his sin deserved followed, and he made amends for the evil he had done by tears of repentance. Much later, David was sitting opposite the enemy lines, and desired longingly to drink from their cistern.[26] Chosen soldiers of his broke through the enemy troops, and returned unharmed with the water the king had desired. But the man who had been taught by his chastisements immediately reproached himself for having endangered his soldiers by his desire for water. He poured it out, making a libation to the Lord, as it is written there: *He poured it out to the Lord.*[27] The water he poured out was changed into a sacrifice to the Lord, because he slaughtered his sin of eager desire by the penance of self-censure. The man who had once been unafraid to lust after another man's wife was later terrified at having desired water. Since he remembered he had committed something forbidden, he was strict with himself, and refrained even from what was allowed.

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[24] Ex 20:17 [25] 2 S 11:2-4 [26] 2 S 12:13-20 [27] 2 S 23:14-17

We are truly repentant if we weep bitterly over the actions we have committed. Let us consider the riches of our Creator's attitude toward us. He has seen us sinning, and has borne with it. He who forbade us to sin before we did it, does not stop waiting to pardon us even after we have sinned. The One we have rejected is calling us. We have turned away from him, but he has not turned away. Hence Isaiah said, *Your eyes shall see your Teacher, and your ears shall hear the voice of a Counselor behind you.*[28] A person is counseled to his face, so to speak, when he is created for righteousness and receives the precepts of rectitude. When he despises these precepts, it is as if he is turning his back to his Creator's face. But he still follows behind us, and counsels us that we have despised him but that he still does not cease to call us. We turn our backs on his face, so to speak, when we reject his words, when we trample his commandments under foot; but he who sees that we reject him, and still calls out to us by his commandments, and waits for us by his patience, stands behind us, and calls us back when we have turned away.

Consider, dearly beloved, that if one of your servants were suddenly to become proud, and turn his back on you when you are speaking to him, wouldn't the master who has been scorned strike him for his pride, and punish him strictly? You see how by sinning we have turned our back to our Creator's face, and yet he bears with us. Out of kindness he calls us back, when we have turned away out of pride. He who could have struck us as we were turning away, promises us rewards in order to get us to return. Our Creator's great mercy should soften the harshness of our guilt.

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[28] Is 30:20-21

And let the person who could have been struck for the evil he has done, at least feel shame when he realizes that One is waiting for him.

I tell you something briefly, my friends, which I learned from Maximian, a reputable man, then abbot of my monastery and a priest, and now bishop of Syracuse. If you listen to it attentively, I believe it will be of no little support to you.[16*]

Recently, in our own times, there was a certain Victorinus, who was also called Emilian. He was not without means, when compared with most people. Since sins of the flesh frequently hold sway when possessions are abundant, he fell into a certain wicked deed, with the result that he had reason to be greatly afraid and to think of the horror of his death. Reflecting upon his guilt, he felt remorse, rose up against himself, abandoned all the things of the world and sought out a monastery. In this monastery he lived so humbly, and was so severe toward himself, that all his brothers, who had grown up there in the love of divine things, were forced to feel contempt for their own lives as they saw his repentance. He eagerly tormented his body, wholly exerting his mind to this end, he crushed his self-will, he sought time for secret prayer, he poured himself out in daily tears, he was eager to be despised, and he feared the respect offered him by his brothers.

He was accustomed to arrive early at the night offices of the brothers, and since the mountain on which the monastery was located jutted out on one side in a more solitary spot, he had made it his custom to go out there before the offices to devote himself daily to tears of repentance. He could do this more freely because the place was more hidden. He used to think about the great severity of his judge who was to come, and being already of one heart with the judge, he requited the guilt of his wicked deed with his tears.

One night the abbot of the monastery, while on watch, caught sight of him as he was going out secretly. He followed him outside, keeping behind him. When he saw him lying prostrate in prayer on the hidden side of the mountain, he decided to wait to see when he would get up, to discover the length of his prayer. Suddenly a heavenly light came down, surrounding him as he lay prostrate in prayer. So great a brightness spread abroad in that place that an entire part of the region shone with the light.

When the abbot saw it, he began to tremble and fled. After a long period of time, when the brother had returned to the monastery, his abbot, wanting to learn whether he had been aware of the diffusion of so great a light upon him, asked him eagerly, 'Where were you?' Believing that he could escape discovery, the brother answered that he had been in the monastery. As he continued in his denial, the abbot was compelled to tell him what he had seen. Realizing that he had been detected, the brother made this known too, which had escaped the abbot: 'When you saw the light coming down upon me from heaven, a voice came likewise, saying, "Your sin has been forgiven".' Almighty God could indeed have forgiven his sin while remaining silent. By speaking aloud, by shining abroad, he wanted by the example of his mercy to arouse our hearts to repentance.[16*]

We marvel, dearly beloved, that the Lord threw Saul, his persecutor, to the ground from heaven, that he addressed him from heaven. You see that in our own times too a repentant sinner heard a voice from heaven. The former was asked, *Why are you persecuting me?*[29] The latter was found worthy to hear, 'Your sin has been forgiven'. The repentant sinner was far less deserving than Paul. But because I am speaking in this connection of Saul, who was breathing cruelty and slaughter, allow me to say boldly that Saul heard words of rebuke on account of his pride, but Victorinus heard words of consolation on account of his humility. Humility had brought him low, and therefore divine love raised him up; because Paul's pride had exalted him, divine severity humbled him.

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29. Ac 9:4

Have confidence, my friends, in our Creator's mercy. Consider what you are doing, reconsider what you have done. Look at the liberality of heavenly love, and come with tears to your merciful judge, while he is still waiting for you. Keep in mind that he is just, and do not disregard your sins; keep in mind that he is loving, and do not lose hope. The human God offers humans confidence with God. There is great hope for us if we repent, because our advocate has become our judge. He lives and reigns with the Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

NOTES

1. Homily 34 in Migne (*PL* 1246). Aside from the fact that both Bu and W specify that this is the Gospel passage to be read on the Friday following the octave day of Pentecost, there is nothing in the homily itself which might help one identify precisely on what liturgical occasion it could have been delivered.
2. This sentence and the next three sentences are in Bede's *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 285, 2169/74).
3. This sentence, plus the rest of this paragraph—except for its final sentence—was used by Bede in his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 285, 2174/95).
4. Two more paragraphs, with the omission of a sentence towards the end, taken over by Bede for use in his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 285, 2196 - 286, 2225).
5. Three more paragraphs, with a sentence within them being omitted, adopted by Bede for his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 286, 2225 - 287, 2263).
6. The alternate reading to be found in some of the Latin manuscripts of the New Testament, to which Gregory is referring here, is *emundat*, 'cleansed', whereas the reading that prevailed in the Latin text of the Gospels used by Gregory was *euertit*, 'upset'.
7. Two sentences taken over by Bede for his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 30, 426/32).
8. From Saint Jerome's *Interpretation of Hebrew Names* (CC 72: 82, 7/8).
9. Also from the above (140, 24).
10. This meaning of the Hebrew name Raphael would appear to come from Saint Jerome's *Commentary on Daniel* (CC 75A: 857, 921 - 858, 937). This passage also includes the meanings of Michael and Gabriel.
11. Five additional sentences used by Bede in *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 30, 432/39).
12. From Saint Jerome's *Interpretation of Hebrew Names* (CC 72: 121, 24 - 122, 25).

13. From pseudo-Denys the so-called Areopagite—see Ac 17:34—*Concerning the Celestial Hierarchy* 7, 9, 13.
14. The last half of this sentence, plus the two following sentences, are to be found in Bede's *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 27, 322/28).
15. The remainder of this paragraph, except for the final clause, was taken by Bede for his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 287, 2265/76).
16. This story of Victorinus/Emilian is unusual in not being repeated in Gregory's *Dialogues*.

homily 35

When you hear of wars and uprisings, do not be afraid; it must be that these things happen first, but the end will not be at once. Then he said to them: Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be great earthquakes in various regions and plagues and famines, and there will be terrors from heaven and great signs. But before all this they will lay hands on you and persecute you, they will hand you over to their synagogues, bringing you before kings and governors for my name's sake: These things will happen to you in testimony. Decide therefore in your hearts not to meditate beforehand how to answer, for I will give you a mouth and wisdom which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict. You will be delivered up by your parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. And you shall be hated by all people for my name's sake. But not a hair on your head shall perish. By your patience, you will gain possession of your lives.
(Luke 21: 9-19)[1]*

Since I have traveled some distance from the city, I must speak rather briefly in explanation of the holy gospel so that I may not be prevented from returning by the lateness of the hour. Our Lord and Redeemer made known the evils that will precede the destruction of the world so that the coming events will disturb us less in that they are foreknown. Blows we see coming strike us less forcibly, and we accept the evils of the world more patiently, if we are fortified against them by the shield of foreknowledge.

For he says: *When you hear of wars and uprisings, do not be afraid; it must be that these things happen first, but the end will not be at once.* We must ponder our Redeemer's words. He is making it known that we will suffer some things from the outside and others from within. Wars have to do with our enemies, uprisings with our fellow citizens.[2]* To reveal to us that we are going to be thrown into confusion from without and from within, he tells us that we will undergo one thing from our enemies and another from our brothers. But when these evils have gone before, he adds that the end will not follow immediately.

Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; and there will be great earthquakes in various regions, and plagues and famines; and there will be terrors from heaven and great signs; or, as we find in some manuscripts, *terrors from heaven and storms;* and after this, *and there will be great signs.* The final tribulation is anticipated by many others, and the frequent evils that anticipate it reveal the everlasting ones that are going to follow. And so after wars and uprisings the end will not be at once, because many evils have to come first in order to be effective in proclaiming the evil that will not end.

Since he tells of so many signs of disorder, it will be best for me to treat them briefly, one by one. Some we must endure as coming from the heavens, others from the earth, some from the elements, others from human beings. *Nation will rise against nation*—you see the disorder among human beings; *there will be great earthquakes in various regions*—an expression of wrath from above; *there will be plagues*—physical indisposition; *there will be famine*—sterility of the earth; *and terrors from heaven and storms*—abnormalities in the air. Since all things are to come to an end, all things will be thrown into disorder before the end, and we who have transgressed in every way will be chastised in every way, to fulfill the words: *The entire world will fight for him against the reckless.*[1]

Everything we received as an occasion for life we turned into an occasion for sin; everything we bent into an occa-

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1. Ws 5:20 (V 5:21)

sion for depravity will be turned for us into an occasion for punishment. We have turned the calm of human peace into an occasion for empty safety; we have preferred traveling over the earth to dwelling in our own land; we have reduced our bodily health to an occasion for vice; we have twisted fertility and abundance away from physical necessities to wrongful pleasure; we have forced the serene pleasures of the weather to serve our love of earthly gratification. The just result is that everything that served our vices when we wrongfully compelled it to do so is at the same time a source of affliction for us, so that we are forced later to experience from the world as many torments as the joys we previously possessed when we were safe.

We must notice that *there will be terrors and storms.* Since winter storms are usual at the turn of the season, why does the Lord foretell in this place that they will come as a sign of destruction, except to make known that these storms are coming out of season? Storms which come in their turn are not a sign, but storms which confound the orderly procession of the season come as a sign. This we recently experienced, because we saw an entire summertime changed by winter rains.

But because all these calamities do not result from the capriciousness of the one bringing them about, but are the deserts of the world suffering them, he says that the deeds of wicked human beings come first: *But before all this, they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, and they will hand you over to their synagogues, bringing you before kings and governors for my name's sake,* as if to say, 'First people's hearts are disordered, and after them the elements'. This is to indicate the cause of the punishment when the order of nature is upset. For although the end of the world impends in its own order, yet finding some who are more wicked, he reveals to them that they are deserving of being overwhelmed by its destruction. He adds, *after bringing you before kings and governors for my name's sake: these things will happen to you in testimony.*[3]* Testimony of whom, unless of those who inflict death by persecution, who do not imitate what they see? The death of the righteous is a help to the good, but a testimony to the wicked, so that for the same reason the evil may perish without an excuse and the elect take a model for life.

But because the hearts of the weak could be disturbed on hearing so many frightening things, he immediately offers them consolation, adding: *Decide therefore in your hearts not to meditate beforehand how to answer, for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict.* This is to tell his members who are not strong: 'Do not be frightened, do not be overly afraid. You are going forth to the contest, but it is I who fight. You bring forth words, but it is I who speak.'

You will be delivered up by your parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. Evils brought by outsiders cause us less sorrow than the anguish which we suffer from those whose good intentions we took for granted, since the evils of lost love pain us together with the physical injury. It is for this reason that the Lord said of Judas, who betrayed him, in the words of the prophet: *And indeed if my enemy had taunted me I could have borne it; and if one who hated me had spoken ill of me, I could hide from him. But it is you, who are of one mind with me, my companion, my friend; we shared pleasant meals, and we walked in fellowship in the Lord's house;*[2] and again, *The man of my peace in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has increased his plots against me.*[3] It is as if he were saying of his betrayer, 'His apostasy was all the more painful since I realized that it came from one who appeared to be my friend.' All the elect conform to their Head in their sufferings, since they are members of the body of this divine Head. They will realize at death who their opponents were, whom they trusted in life; and the reward for their labor will grow in proportion to their increase in virtue, even though this results from someone else's loss of love.

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[2] Ps 55:12-14 (V 54:13-15)

[3] Ps 41:9 (V 40:10)

But since the things foretold about the pain of death are hard to bear, he immediately brings in the consoling joy of the resurrection: *But not a hair of your head will perish.*[4]* We know, my friends, that flesh hurts when cut, but hair does not. He tells his martyrs, *Not a hair of your head will perish,* meaning, 'Why are you afraid that what hurts when cut will perish, when even that part of you which does not hurt when cut cannot perish?'

By your patience will you gain possession of your lives. Possession of life is based on the virtue of patience, since patience is the root and guardian of all the virtues. We gain possession of our lives by patience, since when we learn to govern ourselves, we begin to gain possession of the very thing we are. True patience consists in bearing calmly the evils done us by another, and in not being consumed by resentments against the person who inflicts them. A person who bears the evils done him by his neighbor, so that he suffers them in silence, while looking for a time for suitable revenge, is not practicing patience but only displaying it. It is written that *Love is patient and kind.*[4] It is patient in bearing evils done by another, and it is kind in that it even loves those it bears with. Hence Truth himself tells us: *Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, pray for those who persecute and calumniate you.*[5] It is a virtue in the sight of others to bear with one's opponents, but virtue in God's sight is to love them. God accepts only this sacrifice, enkindled by the flame of love on the altar of good works before him.

But we should know that often we appear patient because we are unable to repay evils. A person who does not repay an evil because he can't is not patient, as I have said. We are not looking for a patience on the surface but in the heart. The vice of impatience destroys teaching, which is the nurse of virtues. It is written: *The teaching of a man is known by his patience.*[6] Each person shows himself to be less learned the

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4. 1 Co 13:4 5. Mt 5:44, Lk 6:27–28 6. Pr 19:11

more he proves to be less patient. He cannot truly impart good by his teaching if he does not know how to bear calmly with the evils done him by another. It is Solomon again who discloses how high patience is on the scale of the virtues: *Better a patient man than a brave one, a man master of himself than one who takes cities.*[7] [5]*Taking cities is a smaller victory because the places we conquer are outside of ourselves; a greater one is won by patience, because a person overcomes himself, and subjects himself to himself, when patience brings him low in bearing with others in humility.

But we must be aware that it often happens to the patient that at the time they suffer opposition or hear insults they feel no distress and they practice patience, taking care also to guard their innocence of heart. But after a little while they call to mind the things they have endured, and blaze up in violent resentment. They seek ways of revenge, and lose the gentleness they had when they were willing to bear with others. They pass judgment on themselves by their change of heart.

Our cunning opponent stirs up war against two persons, rousing one to be the first to inflict insults, and provoking the other who has been harmed to return them. Because he is already the victor over the one he moved to offer the insults, his resentment against the one he couldn't stir up to return the injury is fiercer. So it happens that he rises with all his might against the one he regards as having borne the insults bravely. Since he couldn't stir him up when the injuries occurred, he withdraws for a time from the open contest, looking for a time to deceive him in his secret thoughts. Though he has lost in the public war, he is privately on fire to practice his arts of treachery. In a period of tranquility he returns to the victor's mind, and recalls to him his losses or his injuries. He greatly exaggerates everything that was inflicted upon him, shows that it was intolerable, and agitates his peaceful mind to such a degree

7. Pr 16:32

of rage that often the patient one, even after his victory, is taken captive. Ashamed at having borne those things calmly, and regretting that he has not returned the insults, he seeks to do worse to the other person if he has a chance.

Whom do these resemble, except those who are victorious on the field of battle, but later through their carelessness are captured within the confines of the city? Whom do they resemble but those attacked by serious illness, who survive it, but die of a slight recurring fever? The one who truly observes patience bears with the evils done by another, without resenting them at the time, and rejoices when he thinks back over them, glad that he endured them. He does not want to have the good of patience, which he guarded when he was greatly disturbed, perish during a period of calm.

We are celebrating today the heavenly birthday of a martyr. We must not consider ourselves altogether strangers to his virtue of patience. If with the Lord's help we are striving to observe the virtue of patience, though we are living in a time of peace for the Church, yet we are holding the palm of martyrdom. There are in truth two kinds of martyrdom: one in the heart, the other in heart and action at the same time. And so we can be martyrs, even if we are not slain by anyone's sword. To die at the hands of a persecutor is unmistakably martyrdom; to bear insults, to love one who hates us, is martyrdom in our secret thought.

Truth, who asked the sons of Zebedee, *Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?*[8] testifies that there are two kinds of martyrdom, one in our secret actions, the other in public. When they immediately answered, *We are able,* the Lord replied, *You will indeed drink my cup.*[9] What do we understand by his cup except his passion, of which he said elsewhere: *Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.*[10] But the sons of Zebedee, James, that is, and John, did not both die as martyrs; yet each heard that he would drink of the cup. John did not end his life in martyrdom, yet was a martyr, because he sustained in his heart the suffering he did not undergo in his body. We too, following his example, can be martyrs without a sword, if we truly guard patience in our minds.

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[8] Mt 20:22 [9] Mt 20:23 [10] Mt 26:39; Mk 14:35

[6]*I do not think it irrelevant, dearly beloved, to tell you an example of patient endurance for your instruction. In our own days there was a certain Stephen, abbot of a monastery located near the walls of the city of Rieti. He was a very holy man, outstanding in patience. There are many still with us who knew him, and speak of his life and death. His speech was simple, his life shrewd. He had despised all things out of love for our heavenly home; he felt shame at owning anything in this world; he avoided the noisy company of others; he was assiduous at frequent and prolonged prayer. The virtue of patience had increased mightily in him, to the extent that he believed the person who had imposed any annoyance on him a friend, gave thanks for insults, considered any loss occurring to him in his poverty a great gain, and judged all his opponents to be nothing else than his helpers.

When the day of his death was pressing the departure from his body upon him, many people came together to commend their souls to so holy a soul passing from this world. When those who had gathered round his bed were all standing there, some saw with their bodily eyes angels entering, but were unable to speak; others saw nothing at all; but such exceedingly great fear overcame all present that no one could remain there as the holy soul was departing. Those who had seen the angels and those who had seen nothing at all were overcome with the same fear, and in their terror they fled. No one was able to remain there as he was dying.

Consider, my friends, how almighty God may frighten us when he comes as a severe judge, if he so frightened those standing there when he came to bring a gracious reward. Consider the fear he can cause when we will be able to see him, if he so shattered the minds of those who were present, even when he could not be seen. See, dearly beloved, to what a high reward the patience this man preserved, even in a time of peace in the Church, lifted him up. What were his Creator's inner gifts to one whose great glory he revealed even outwardly to us on the day of his departure? To whom should we believe that he was united except to the holy martyrs when our bodily eyes testify that he was received by the blessed spirits? Stephen yielded up his soul untouched by any sword, and yet as he departed this life he received a crown for the patience he held in his heart. We verify daily the truth of what was said before my time: the holy Church of the elect is filled with flowers, lilies in time of peace, and roses in time of war.

We should be aware, furthermore, that there are three areas in which the virtue of patience is usually exercised. Some of the things we sustain come from God, some from our ancient adversary, some from our neighbors. We endure persecutions, losses and insults from our neighbors, temptations from our ancient adversary, and chastisements from God. In all of these three areas our hearts must watch carefully, lest they be drawn to returning evil for the evil done us by our neighbor, or misled to delight or consent to wrongs, in the case of temptations from our adversary, or be overhasty to make excessive complaints against the chastisements of our Creator. Our adversary is completely overcome when our hearts are not drawn to delight and consent amid his temptations, and are preserved from hatred amid insults from our neighbor, and are restrained from murmuring amid chastisements from God.

When we do these things, let us not seek to be repaid with present advantages. The good things that we are to hope for in return for the labor of patience belong to the life to come. It is when all our labor entirely ceases that the reward of our labor will commence. The psalmist says, *The poor shall not always be forgotten; the patience of the poor shall* *not perish for ever.*[11] We see the patience of the poor perished, so to speak, when the humble are paid nothing in return for it in this life; but the patience of the poor does not perish for ever, because we receive its renown once all hardships are brought to an end.

Preserve patience in your hearts, my friends, and put it into action when the situation calls for it. Do not let any insulting word of your neighbor stir you up to hatred, or any loss of the things that will perish upset you. If you are steadfast in fearing the loss of the things that last for ever, you will not seriously consider the loss of things that pass away; if you have regard for the glory of our eternal recompense, you will not resent a temporal injury. Bear with those who oppose you, but so that you love those you bear with. Seek eternal rewards in return for temporal losses. None of you should count on being able to carry this out by his own strength: procure it by your prayers, so that he who commands it may provide it. We know that he gladly listens to those who ask him, when they ask him to grant what he commands. When we continually besiege him in prayer, he quickly comes to our assistance in temptation. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with the Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.

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[11] Ps 9:18 (V 9:19)

NOTES

1. Homily 35 in Migne (*PL* 1259). Even though both Bu and W note that this Gospel passage is to be read on the feast of Marcellinus, a Roman priest and martyr, and Peter, an exorcist also martyred at Rome—their martyrdom was commemorated on June 2 according to the martyrology—in the course of the homily Gregory says that they are celebrating the heavenly birthday of a single, unnamed martyr. But since the martyrology indicates that the commemoration of the martyrdom of St. Marcellinus, an early pope whose name is listed among the earliest of the Roman pontiffs in the canon of the mass, was observed on April 26, it would seem that perhaps the homily was delivered on this occasion.
2. A single sentence used by Bede in both his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 365, 83/84) and his *Commentary on Mark* (CC 120: 596, 57/58).
3. This paragraph, together with the next and the first two sentences of the succeeding paragraph, is to be found in Bede's *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 366, 116/36).
4. Seven sentences taken over by Bede for use in his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 366, 137/41; 367, 160/64, 169/73).
5. A single sentence used by Bede in his *Commentary on the Book of Proverbs,* 16:32 (CC 119B: 94, 169/72).
6. This story is repeated in a somewhat shorter version in Gregory's *Dialogues* 4:19.

homily 36

Then he said to them: A certain man gave a great dinner and invited many. He sent his servant at the time for the dinner to tell those who had been invited that they should come. And they all alike began to make excuses. The first one said to him, 'I have bought a farm and I must go out and see it. I ask you, have me excused.' And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen and I am going to examine them. I ask you, have me excused.' And another said, 'I have married a wife and therefore cannot come.' The servant returned and reported these things to his master. Then the householder in anger said to his servant: 'Go out quickly into the streets and districts of the city and bring in here the poor and the feeble and the blind and the lame.' And the servant said, 'Master, what commanded has been done, and still there is room.' And the master said to the servant, 'Go out quickly into the roads and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled. For I tell you, none of those men who were called shall taste my dinner.'

(Luke 14.16-24)[1]*

We are accustomed to finding a difference between pleasures of the body and those of the heart, dearly beloved.[2]* Bodily pleasures, when we do not possess them, arouse in us a great desire for them, but as soon as we possess and devour them, our satisfaction turns to distaste. Spiritual pleasures, on the other hand, seem distasteful when not possessed, but once we possess them, we desire them. The more hungrily the one enjoying them seeks them, the more does the one hungering for them enjoy them. In the former the desire pleases, the realization displeases; in the latter as the desire is paltry, the realization is all the more pleasing. In the former desire produces satiety, and satiety distaste, but in the latter desire causes satiety and satiety desire.

Spiritual pleasures increase our inner longing even while they satisfy, because the more we savor them, the more do we perceive that there is something to be loved more. But when we do not possess them, we cannot love them, because their savor is unknown. Who can love what he does not know? The psalmist counsels us, *Taste and see that the Lord is good,*[1] meaning 'You will not get to know his goodness unless you taste it. Touch the food of life with the taste buds of your heart, so that trying it may make you capable of loving its sweetness.'

Humanity lost these delights when it sinned in paradise.[2] It went forth, its mouth closed against the food of eternal sweetness. We too are born amid the hardships of exile. We have come to this place with a feeling of loathing. We do not know what we ought to desire. The more we separate ourselves from partaking of this sweetness, the more does the disease of our loathing increase. We do not now desire inner pleasures since we have long been unaccustomed to taste them. We are consumed with loathing, and are worn out by the long scourge of starvation. Because of our inner unwillingness to taste the sweetness that has been prepared for us, in our wretched state we have an outer love of our hunger.

But heavenly Constancy does not abandon us who have abandoned him. He calls before the eyes of our memory the delights we have rejected, and sets them before us again. By a promise he drives away our lethargy; he invites us to rid ourselves of our loathing. [3]* *A certain man gave a great dinner and invited many.* Who is this man but the one of whom the prophet said, *He is a human being, and who will get to know him?*[3] He gave a great dinner, because he prepared for us a fullness of interior pleasures. He calls many, but few come, because sometimes those who are subject to him by their faith impugn his meal by their evil lives.

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[1] Ps 34:8 (V 33:9) [2] Gn 3:6 [3] Jr 17:9 (LXX)

He sent his servant at the time for the dinner to tell those who had been invited that they should come. What is the time for the dinner but the end of the world? It is the period in which we now live, as Paul long ago bore witness, when he spoke of us *upon whom the end of the ages has come.*[4] So it is now the time for the dinner, and we are being called. As we see that the end of the age has come near, we have all the less reason to excuse ourselves from God's meal. As we reflect that there is no time remaining, we must dread to lose the time of grace at hand. God's meal is not called a lunch but a dinner, because after lunch dinner is still to come, whereas after dinner there is no remaining meal. Because God's eternal meal will be made ready for us at the very end, it was appropriate to call this not a lunch but a dinner.

Whom does the servant sent by the head of the household to issue his invitation signify but the order of those who preach? You may think me unworthy of this order, and I am oppressed by the burden of my own sins—still, I am living during these days, and when I say something to you for your instruction, this is what I am doing—for I serve the supreme Householder. When I counsel you to reject the world, I am coming to invite you to God's dinner. No one should look down on me in this place for being what I am, although I may not seem worthy to be inviting you. Still, the delights I promise you are great.

What I tell you often happens, my friends. A powerful personage may have a servant who is despised. When he orders him to get an answer from his own subjects, perhaps, or from outsiders, they do not despise the servant as he speaks to them because of the respect they feel for the master who sent him. His hearers do not consider the one by whom the message came, but what it is they hear, and from whom it comes. Thus, my friends, must you conduct yourselves. Perhaps you rightly look down upon me, but have in your hearts respect for the Master who is call-

[4] 1 Co 10:11

ing you. Obey gladly his invitation to become guests of the supreme Householder. Examine your hearts, and drive from them this fatal loathing.[4]* But if you are still materially-minded, perhaps you are looking for a material feast. But see how material feasts have been transformed for us into spiritual food! The perfect Lamb has been slain for you at the dinner of God, in order to remove your inner loathing.

What do we do when we see that many people still do what is next said? *And they all alike began to make excuses.* God offers what we should have asked him for; and when he is not asked, he desires to give what we could scarcely have hoped for. Because he deigned to give bountifully when asked, he was despised. He declared that the pleasures of eternal refection were ready, and all alike excused themselves.

Let us look at a small matter, so that we may have a just appreciation of a greater one. If some powerful person should send an invitation to a poor one, I ask you, my friends, what would that poor person do? He would rejoice over this invitation, reply humbly, change his clothes, and hurry to go as quickly as possible so that no one else should arrive before him at the powerful man's banquet. A rich man sends out an invitation, and the poor hurry to arrive. We are invited to God's banquet, and we excuse ourselves.

But see how I am able to judge what your hearts answer you in this matter. Perhaps they say to themselves in their secret reflections: 'We will not make excuses, for we are glad to be called to that banquet of heavenly refreshment, and to come there.' When they say this, your minds are telling the truth if they do not love earthly things more than heavenly ones, and if they are not more engaged with material affairs than with spiritual ones. And so the reason for their making excuses is added here: *The first one said, I have bought a farm, and I must go out and see it. I ask you, have me excused.* What does the farm signify but earthly possessions? A person who thinks only of external things, on account of his possessions, goes out to see his farm.

Another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen and I am going to examine them. I ask you, have me excused. What do we understand by these five yoke of oxen but the body's five senses? They are properly called five 'yoke' because they are paired in the two sexes. Because the bodily senses cannot comprehend inner matters, but only investigate external things, and because they turn away from what is within to treat only what is outside, they aptly indicate inquisitiveness. As inquisitiveness seeks to inquire into the lives of others, it seldom knows what is within itself; it is strongly inclined to think about external things. The vice of inquisitiveness is a serious one. When it leads anyone to an outward search into his neighbor's life, it always hides from him his own inward disposition. Knowing what pertains to another person, such a one does not know what pertains to himself. The more an inquisitive person's mind is acquainted with the deserts of another, the more it is unaware of its own.

This is why it is said of these five yoke of oxen, *I am going to examine them. I ask you, have me excused.* These words of excuse do not differ from the indication of his vice, when he says, *I am going to examine them,* because examination is often related to inquisitiveness.

We should note that both of these men who excuse themselves from the dinner of the man who invited them, one on account of his farm, and one to examine his yoke of oxen, mingle words of humility when they say: *I ask you, have me excused.* When they say 'ask' and yet refuse to come, there is humility in their words, but pride in their actions. This is the decision that every bad person makes when he listens but does not stop doing what he has decided to do. When we say to anyone doing wrong, 'Turn around, follow God and leave the world behind,' where are we calling him except to the Lord's dinner? And when he answers, 'Pray for me because I am a sinner, I cannot do it,' what is he doing but both asking and making an excuse? By saying 'I am a sinner,' he suggests humility, but when he adds, 'I cannot be converted,' he is indicating pride. He asks and makes excuses when he introduces humility into his words, and practices pride in his actions.

And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come. What do we take the wife to mean but physical pleasure? Marriage is good and created by divine Providence to produce offspring, but some people do not wish from it fruitfulness in childbearing but the fulfillment of their desire for pleasure. Therefore something wrongful can aptly be denoted by something right. A supreme Householder is inviting you to a dinner, an eternal banquet, but one person is given to avarice, another to inquisitiveness, another to physical pleasure. All the reprobates alike are making excuses. When worldly care engages one, keen thought about others' actions ravages another, physical pleasure pollutes the mind of a third, those who are filled with loathing are not hastening to the feast of eternal life.

The servant returned and reported these things to his master. Then the householder in anger said to his servant: Go out quickly into the streets and districts of the city, and bring in here the poor and the feeble and the blind and the lame. A person attached to his earthly possessions more than is right refuses to come to the Lord's dinner; one who sweats at his inquisitive work feels loathing for the food of life that has been prepared; one who is a slave to his physical desires rejects the sumptuous food of the spiritual banquet. And therefore, because the proud decline to come, the poor are chosen. Why is this? Because, according to Paul, *God has chosen what is weak in the world to shame the strong.*[5]

We must notice how those who are called, and who do come to the dinner, are described: poor, and feeble. The feeble are those who in their own judgment are weak; the poor, like the strong, are proud even in their state of poverty; the blind are those who lack the light of intelligence; the lame are those who are unable to move ahead in the

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5. 1 Co 1:27

right way. When vices of character are signified by physical infirmities, it becomes apparent that just as those who were called and refused to come were sinners, so these too, who are invited and do come, are sinners. Proud sinners are rejected, so that humble sinners can be chosen.

God has chosen the despised in the world[6] because often being despised recalls a person to himself. The son who left his father, and squandered the share of the property he had received, came to himself after he began to be hungry, and said: *How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough?*[7] He had departed far from himself when he sinned; if he had not become hungry he would not have come to himself. It was after he felt the loss of his earthly possessions that he began to think of what he had lost of his spiritual possessions. The poor and the feeble, the blind and the lame, are called, and come, because the weak and the despised in this world are often quicker to hear the voice of God, as in this world they have nothing to delight them.

The Egyptian servant of the Amalekites is a good example of this.[8] When the Amalekites were plundering and moving about, he was left behind on the road sick, and fainting from hunger and thirst. When David found him he provided him with food and drink, and as soon as he revived he became David's guide, found the celebrating Amalekites, and with great bravery overthrew the people who had left him behind sick.

Amalekite means 'a people that laps'.[5*] What does 'a people that laps' signify but the hearts of the worldly? Going about after the things of earth, it is as if they are lapping them up when they take delight in temporal things alone. A lapping people takes plunder, so to speak, when out of its love for earthly things it heaps up profit from others' losses. The Egyptian servant is left behind on the road sick, because all sinners, once they begin to grow weak from the situation of this world, soon come to be despised by worldly

[6] 1 Co 1:28
[7] Lk 15:17
[8] 1 S 30:11-16

minds. David found him, and provided him with food and drink, because the Lord, who is 'brave in hand' (if we attribute to him the meaning of David's name),[6*] does not despise what the world has cast aside. Often he directs to the grace of his love those who are not strong enough to follow the world, and who are, so to speak, left behind on the road, holding out to them the food and drink of his word. It is as if he chooses them as guides for himself on the road when he makes them his preachers. When they bring Christ to the hearts of sinners, it is as if they are leading David upon the enemy, and, like David, they strike the celebrating Amalekites with the sword, because by the Lord's power they overthrow all the proud who had despised them in the world. The Egyptian slave who had been left behind on the road kills the Amalekites, because often those who once were not strong enough to run with the worldly in this world, still are able to subdue their minds by their preaching.

[7*]Let us hear what the servant adds when the poor had been led into the dinner: *Master, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.* Many of the kind of people I've been speaking of were brought out of Judea to the Lord's dinner, but the multitude of Israelites who believed did not fill the space of the heavenly banquet. A throng of Jews had already entered, but room still remained in the kingdom for the great number of the Gentiles who were to be received. Hence the servant is told, *Go out quickly into the roads and hedges, and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled.*

When the Lord invites to his dinner people from the streets and districts, he is indicating those who knew how to keep his law under an urban way of life; when he commands that his fellow banqueters be brought in from the roads and hedges, he is surely seeking to gather a rural people, that is, the Gentiles. Of this meaning the psalmist says: *Then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice before the face of the*

Lord, for he comes.[9] The Gentiles are called 'trees of the wood' because in their unbelief they were always gnarled and fruitless. And so it is as if those who were turned from their rustic practices came to the Lord's dinner from the hedges.

We should notice that in this third invitation people were not invited, but 'compelled' to come in.[8]* Some people are called and refuse to come; others are called and do come; but of others it is not said that they are called, but that they are compelled to come in. Those who receive the gift of understanding, but do not follow up this understanding in their works, are called and refuse to come. Those who fulfill in their works the grace of the understanding they have received are called and do come. But certain people are called in such a way that they are even compelled.

There are some who understand the good they are to do but stop doing it;[9]* they see what they ought to do but do not willingly pursue it. It often happens to them,[10]* as I said above, that the adversity of this world touches them in their material desires; they try to gain temporal honors but cannot; and when they plan on sailing over the deep sea to this world's important concerns, so to speak, they can always be driven back by adverse blasts to shores where they may be shipwrecked. When they perceive that they are being thwarted in their desires because the world is adverse to them, they recall what they owe their Creator. In their shame they return to him, after deserting him for love of the world in their pride. [11]*Frequently some who want to advance to temporal honors either waste away during a long sickness, or are struck down with injuries and collapse, or are afflicted by heavy losses. Feeling the suffering of the world, they see that they should not have trusted in its enjoyments. Reproaching themselves for their desires, they turn their hearts toward God.

Of these the Lord says by the prophet,[10] *See, I will hedge your road with thorns, and I will hedge it with a wall; and she*

[9] Ps 96:12–13 (V 95:12–13) [10] Ho 2:6–7

shall not find her paths. She shall follow after her lovers but not overtake them; she shall seek them and not find them. And she shall say, I will go and return to my first husband, for it was better with me then than now. God is husband of a faithful soul because it is united to him through faith. A soul which has been united to God follows after its lovers when a heart that has believed through faith surrenders to unclean spirits in its actions, seeking worldly honors, feeding on physical enjoyment, nourishing itself on choice pleasures.

Often almighty God shows concern for such a soul, and mingles bitterness with its pleasures. Hence he says, *I will hedge your roads with thorns.* Our roads are hedged with thorns when we find pricking pains in what we long for wrongly. *And I will hedge them with a wall, and she shall not find her paths.* Our roads are hedged with a wall when hard obstacles stand in the way of our desires in this world; and we cannot find our paths, because we are prevented from acquiring what we sought for wrongly. *She shall follow after her lovers but not overtake them; she shall seek them and not find them,* because the soul gets no grasp at all on the wicked spirits to which it subjected itself by its desires, in its efforts to effect them.

The great profit to be derived from this beneficial adversity follows: *And she shall say, I will go and return to my first husband, for it was better with me then than now.* After finding its roads hedged with thorns, and failing to overtake its lovers, the soul returns to the love of its first husband. Often after failing to get what we want in this world, after growing weary from the impossibility of fulfilling our earthly desires, we bring our minds back to God. Then the one who was displeasing begins to please us, the one whose precepts had been bitter to us becomes suddenly sweet in our memories; and the sinful soul which tried to be an adulteress and plainly could not do so forms the resolution of becoming a faithful wife.[12*] What is happening to those overcome by the adversities of this world who return to the love of God, who are led away from the desires of the present life, dearly beloved, except that they are being compelled to come in?

But the sentence which immediately follows should alarm us greatly. Have the ears of your hearts alert to take it in, my brothers and my masters: brothers in so far as you are sinners, masters in so far as you are righteous: have your ears alert, so that you may be the less likely to learn of it at the judgment the more fearful you are now you have heard it preached.[13]* He says: *For I tell you, none of those men who were called shall taste my dinner.*

You see how he himself calls, how he calls by the angels, by the patriarchs, the prophets, the apostles, by pastors, and even by me; often he calls by miracles, often by calamities; sometimes he calls by prosperity in this world, sometimes by adversity. Let no one treat this lightly: if he has excused himself when he was called, when he wants to come in he may not be able to. Listen to what Wisdom tells us in the words of Solomon: *Then they will call upon me, and I will not hear; they will rise up in the morning, and will not find me.*[11] It is because of this that the foolish virgins who came late cried out: *Lord, Lord, open to us.* But as they sought an entrance they were told, *Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.*[12]

What should we do in this case, dearly beloved, but abandon everything, lay aside the cares of the world, and attend to our eternal desires alone? But this is given to few. I want to advise you to abandon everything, but I do not venture to do so. If you cannot abandon every worldly thing, then hold on to the things of this world so that you are not held in the world by them; so that you possess earthly things and they do not possess you; so that your heart controls your possessions. If your heart is overcome by the love of earthly things, it may be possessed by its own possessions.

11. Pr 1:28 12. Mt 25:11-12

Therefore you should use the things of time, and long for those of eternity. Let temporal things be for the journey, and long for the eternal things of your arrival. Consider whatever goes on in this world as happening on the periphery, and direct the eyes of the mind toward what is ahead; let them concentrate their entire gaze on their goal. Completely root out vices, not only in activities, but even pluck them out of the thoughts of the heart. Do not let physical pleasures, or inquisitive concerns, or burning ambition keep us from the Lord's dinner. Let the respectable deeds we do in the world affect our hearts peripherally, so to speak, so that the earthly things we delight in may serve our physical being without thwarting our hearts. My friends, I do not dare to tell you to abandon everything, but if you wish to do so, you can abandon all things even while holding on to them, by attending to your temporal affairs in such a way as to tend wholeheartedly toward what is eternal.

Hence the apostle Paul says, *The time is short; from now on let those who have wives be as those who have none, and those who weep be as those not weeping, and those who rejoice as those not rejoicing, and those who buy as those without possessions, and those who deal with this world as those who have no dealings with it. For the form of this world is passing away.*[13]

One who has a wife, but is as if he has none, knows how to fulfill what is due the body without being forced to adhere wholeheartedly to the world because of it. Although this preacher said, *The married man is busy with worldly affairs, how to please his wife,*[14] the married man who is as if not married strives to please his spouse without displeasing his Creator. He weeps as one not weeping who suffers temporal losses but always consoles himself with the thought of eternal gain. He rejoices as one not rejoicing who delights in the good things of time without forgetting the torments of eternity; as joy lifts up his heart, his prudent fear weighs it down. He buys as one without possessions who makes ready earthly things for his use, while providently anticipating that he may soon leave them behind. He deals with this world as one having no dealings with it who gathers everything necessary to carry on his outward life, without allowing these things to dominate him; being subordinate, they serve him externally, and never break his mind's concentration on other matters. For people of this sort every earthly thing is present for their use, and not as something to satisfy desire. They make use of what they need without longing to have anything that would come as a result of sin. Daily they seek a heavenly profit from their possessions, and they rejoice more in good works than in goods owned.

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[13] 1 Co 7:29-31

[14] 1 Co 7:33

This may seem difficult for some, and so I will tell you something about a person whom many of you know. I learned this three years ago from reliable people in the city of Civitavecchia. Recently there was in that city a Count Theophanius.[14]* He was devoted to deeds of mercy, intent on good works, and especially inclined to hospitality. Though he was occupied with his duties as count, and carrying on his earthly and temporal affairs, he did these more from duty than from desire, as became evident from his end.

When his death was near, there was a severe storm that would have prevented his being carried out for burial. Weeping earnestly, his wife inquired of him, 'What shall I do? How shall I get you out for burial, since the storm will not allow me to go out of the door of this house?' He replied, 'Do not weep, woman, for as soon as I have died the weather will become calm.' Death followed his words, and calm his death. His hands and feet were swollen from gout, and had become open sores with matter flowing from them. When according to custom his body was uncovered for washing, his hands and feet were found to be as sound as if he had never had any sores. And so he was carried out and buried. Three days after his burial it seemed good to his wife to change the marble top of his sarcophagus. When it was removed a fragrant odor issued from his body, as if his decaying flesh were swarming with spices rather than worms.

I have told you this to show from a recent example that there are some people who have a worldly profession without having a worldly heart. Those such an obligation involves in the world, so that they cannot be completely separated from it, ought to hold what is of the world in such a way that they do not surrender to it from inner weakness.

Think about these things. When you are unable to leave behind everything of the world, outwardly conduct your external affairs well, but inwardly hasten to those that are eternal. Do not let anything stand in the way of your heart's desire. Do not be involved with any of this world's delights. If you love what is good, be delighted with better goods, heavenly ones. If you fear evil, bring eternal evils to mind. Then when you see that there is more to love, and more to fear, you may not remain altogether attached here. For this we have as our helper the Mediator between God and men.[15] We shall more quickly obtain all things through him if we are aflame with true love for him, who lives and reigns with the Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.

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[15] 1 Tm 2:5

NOTES

1. Homily 36 in Migne (PL 1266). The Gospel book N assigns this pericope to the feast day of St. Lawrence, August 10; Bu has designated it for the vigil of the same feast. There is nothing in the homily itself about St. Lawrence, nor is there any other indication of the liturgical occasion on which it might have been preached.
2. This sentence and the six following sentences—with the exception of the fourth sentence that follows—were used by Bede in his *Commentary on the First Letter of Peter* (CC 121: 230, 183/92).
3. Eleven sentences, omitting the sixth, taken over by Bede for his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 278, 1902 - 279, 1919).

4. The final sentences of this paragraph, together with the next eight and one-half paragraphs—sometimes in a form that has been abbreviated slightly and with some omissions—are to be found in Bede's *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 279, 1920 - 280, 1992).
5. A derivation from the Hebrew taken from Saint Jerome's *Interpretation of Hebrew Names* (CC 72: 61, 2).
6. Saint Jerome in his *Interpretation of Hebrew Names* (CC 72: 103, 11) takes the name David to mean *manu fortis*, 'brave in hand', and Gregory here attributes it to the Lord.
7. Five sentences incorporated by Bede in his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 280, 1992 - 281, 2005).
8. Three sentences used by Bede in his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 281, 2005/2006).
9. The first clause of this sentence is to be found in Bede's *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 281, 2006/2007).
10. The first part of this sentence was adopted by Bede for his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 281, 2007/2009).
11. Another single sentence taken over by Bede for his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 281, 2009/12) with some slight omissions.
12. Two sentences inserted by Bede in his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 281, 2012/16).
13. Three sentences introduced by Bede into his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 281, 2016/23).
14. Gregory relates this story about Count Theophanius in almost the same words in his *Dialogues* 4:27.

homily 37

> *And there were great crowds around him, and he turned and said to them: 'If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Anyone who does not bear his cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost of what is necessary, whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid the foundation and is not able to complete it, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, that this fellow began to build and was not able to finish. Or what king, going to join battle against another king, does not first sit down and take counsel whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? And if not, when the other is still some distance away, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. So therefore, everyone of you who does not renounce all that he possesses cannot be my disciple.'*
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> (Luke 14:16-33)[1]*

If we reflect on what is promised to us in heaven and how great these things are, dearly beloved, everything we have upon earth comes to appear worthless. When we compare our earthly possessions with the happiness of heaven, they seem a burden and not a help. When we compare our life in time with eternal life, we must call it death rather than life. What is our daily decline into decay but a kind of extension of death? What tongue can describe, what mind can grasp the greatness of the joys of the heavenly city—taking part in the choirs of angels, sharing with the blessed spirits in our Creator's glory, seeing the face of God before us, beholding infinite light, feeling no fear of death, rejoicing in the gift of imperishableness?

We take fire even when we hear of these things! Already we long to be there where we hope to rejoice without end. But we attain great rewards only through great labors. Hence Paul preaches that *A person is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.*[1] The greatness of the rewards delights us; but let us not be discouraged by the laborious struggle. Hence Truth says to those coming to him: *If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.*

2*We must carefully inquire how we are commanded to hate our parents and blood relations, when we are ordered to love even our enemies.[2] Truth says of wives, *What God has joined together, let no one separate;*[3] and Paul, *Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church.*[4] The disciple preaches that we must love our wives even though his Master says that a person who *does not hate his wife cannot be my disciple.* Does a judge announce one thing and the herald proclaim another? Or are we able to hate and to love at the same time?

If we weigh the force of the precept, we find that we are capable of doing both, if we make a distinction. We love those who are united to us by physical relationship because we know them as 'neighbors'; and we must not know them, but hate them and flee from them, because we experience them as opponents on our way to God. A person who is unspiritually wise is loved through hatred, so to speak, when we do not listen to the bad things he suggests. The Lord, to show us that this hatred directed toward our neighbors rises not from lack of feeling but from love, added immediately, *and hates even his own life.* We are instructed to hate our neighbors, and to hate our own lives as well. A person then who hates his neighbor as himself must hate him by loving him. We hate our own life in the right way when we do not give in to its bodily desires, when we re-

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1. 2 Tm 2:5 2. Mt 5:44 3. Mt 19:6 4. Eph 5:25

strain its appetites, when we resist its pleasures. When we despise our own life and bring it to a better state, we are, as it were, loving it by hating it. We must undoubtedly make a distinction in hating our neighbors, loving in them what they are, and hating in them what causes them to hinder us in our journey toward God.

When Paul was proceeding toward Jerusalem, the prophet Agabus took his belt and bound his own feet with it, saying: *So will they bind at Jerusalem the man whose belt this is.*[5] What did the man say, who perfectly hated his own life? *I am ready not only to be bound but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus Christ;*[6] *I do not account my life as precious to myself.*[7] See how he hated his life by loving it! In hating it he was loving what he longed to deliver up to death for Jesus, so that he might raise it from the death of sin to life.

Let us draw from this distinction the kind of hatred we are to feel toward our neighbor. Let us love anyone at all opposed to us, but let us not love one who is an obstacle along our road to God, even one related to us. Anyone longing eagerly for the things of eternity ought in the cause of God which he is undertaking to move beyond father, mother, wife, children, relatives, beyond himself, that he may get to know God all the more truly the less he acknowledges anyone else in his cause. It is an important thing that unspiritual feelings divide the heart's attention and obscure its vision; but they do not harm us if we hold them in check. We are, then, to love our neighbors; we are to extend charity to all, relatives and strangers alike, without being turned aside from the love of God for its sake.

We know that when the ark of the Lord was returned from the land of the Philistines to the land of the Israelites, it was placed on a cart. They yoked cows that had recently borne young to the cart, and shut up their calves at home.[7] *And the cows went straight on over the way that leads to Bethshemesh,*

5. Ac 21:11
6. Ac 21:13
7. Ac 20:24
8. 1 S 6:10-11

keeping to the one road, lowing as they went; they turned neither to the right nor to the left.[9] What do these cows represent but the faithful in the Church? When they ponder the sacred precepts it is as if they are carrying the ark of the Lord placed upon them. We should also notice that they are described as having recently borne young. Many who are inwardly set on the way toward God are externally bound by their unspiritual feelings, but they do not turn aside from the right road because they are carrying the ark of God in their hearts.

The cows were going to Bethshemesh, a name meaning 'house of the sun'.[3*] The prophet says: *For you who fear the Lord, the sun of righteousness shall rise.*[10] If we are moving on toward the dwelling place of the everlasting Sun, we do right not to turn aside from the route toward God on account of our unspiritual feelings. We must consider with all our energy that the cows yoked to God's cart moan as they go, lowing from their depths, but do not turn aside from their road. So surely must God's preachers, so must all believers within holy Church, do. They must be compassionate toward their neighbors through their love, while not deviating from God's way through their compassion.

Truth shows how we should manifest hatred of life when he says:[4*] *Anyone who does not bear his cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.*[5*] We bear the Lord's cross in two ways, when we afflict our bodies by abstinence, or reckon our neighbor's need to be our own by compassion. A person who manifests his sorrow at another's need is carrying a cross in his heart. But we must be aware that some people display physical abstinence not for God but for the sake of empty glory; and that many offer compassion toward a neighbor, not spiritually but unspiritually, to dispose him not toward virtue but toward sin, as if by taking pity on him. And so they have the appearance of bearing the cross, but they are not following the Lord. Hence Truth rightly says: *Anyone who does not bear his cross and come after*

9. 1 S 6:12   10. Ml 4:2

me cannot be my disciple. To carry one's cross and go after the Lord is to manifest either physical abstinence or compassion toward a neighbor with a zeal prompted by eternal motives. Whoever manifests them for temporal motives does indeed carry his cross, but he refuses to go after the Lord.

Since lofty precepts have been given, the Lord immediately adds a comparison with the building of something lofty. *For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost of what is necessary, whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying that this fellow began to build, and was not able to finish.* We ought to prepare for everything we do by attention and reflection. According to the voice of Truth, one who builds a tower first provides the cost of the building. If we are eager to construct a tower of humility, we must first ready ourselves against the adversities of this age.

There is this difference between an earthly and a heavenly building. We construct an earthly building by collecting money to defray the expenses, but we construct a heavenly building by distributing it. We make up the cost of the former if we collect what we do not have; we make up the cost of the latter if we leave behind even what we have. The rich man, with many possessions, who inquired of the Master, *Good Master, what shall I do to possess eternal life?*[11] was unable to pay that cost. When he heard the precept to leave behind all things, he withdrew sadly.[12] His inner distress arose from his extensive outer possessions. He loved the cost of his eminence in this life, and was unwilling to pay the cost of humility in his striving for his eternal home.

We must consider the words, *All who see it begin to mock him,* since according to the words of Paul, *We have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to men.*[13] In everything we do we must consider our hidden adversaries. They are

[11] Lk 18:18 [12] Lk 18:22-23 [13] 1 Co 4:9

always concerned with our works, and are always rejoicing over our failures. When he saw them, the prophet said: *My God, I trust in you: let me not be put to shame,, nor let my enemies deride me.*[14] When we are attentive to good works, unless we guard ourselves carefully against wicked spirits, we suffer derision from those who persuade us to do evil.

After giving us a comparison with the construction of a building, he moves on from a lesser to a greater likeness, so that we may consider an important subject in the light of an unimportant one. *Or what king, going to join battle against another king, does not first sit down and take counsel whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? And if not, when the other is still some distance away, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace.* A king comes to do battle against another king the equal of himself. But if he considers carefully that he is unable to hold out, he sends a delegation and begs for terms of peace.

With what tears should we hope for pardon, who in the dreadful inspection do not come to judgment with our king as an equal! Our status, our weakness, our cause reveal us as inferiors. Perhaps we have already cut away the sins of our wicked deeds, already made an outward change from everything wrong. Are we able to offer an explanation of our thoughts? One is said to be coming with twenty thousand, and another coming with ten thousand cannot hold out against him. Twenty thousand is double ten thousand. If we are making great progress, still we hardly preserve our external works from error. Even if we cut away all outward dissipation, we have still not entirely removed it from our hearts. But the one who will come as judge judges outer and inner matters alike; he weighs deeds and thoughts equally. And so the one who examines us, we who are scarcely ready in works alone, on our works and thoughts alike, comes with an army twice the size of ours.

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[14] Ps 25:2 (V 24:2-3)

What must we do, my friends, when we perceive that we are unable to hold out with an army half his size, except send a delegation and ask for terms of peace when he is still some distance away? He is said to be some distance away because we do not yet see him present for judgment. Let us send him our tears as a delegation, let us send him works of mercy. Let us slaughter propitiatory victims on his altar. Let us acknowledge that we cannot contend with him at the judgment; let us consider the power of his strength, and ask for terms of peace. This is our delegation, that reconciles the king who is coming.

Consider, my friends, how fortunate it is that the one who can vanquish us at his arrival is slow in coming. Let us send our delegation to him, as I have said, by weeping, by bestowing alms, and by offering holy sacrifices. The sacrifice of the altar, offered with tears and generosity of heart, pleads in a unique way for our forgiveness, because the one who, *himself rising from the dead, will never die again,*[15] is even now suffering for us anew through this sacrifice in his own mysterious way. As often as we offer him the sacrifice of his passion, we renew his passion for our forgiveness.

It is the case, or so I think, dearly beloved, that many of you know the story that I want to recall to your memories.[6*] It is related how not long ago a certain man was captured by the enemy and transported far away. He was held for a long time in chains, and when he did not return from captivity his wife considered that he had died. She took care to offer the sacrifice for him every week, as for one already dead, and as often as she offered the sacrifice his chains were unshackled in his captivity. When after a long time he returned, he revealed to his wife, since he wondered greatly at it, how on certain days in each week his chains were unshackled. Considering which days and hours these were, she realized that his chains were loosened whenever she remembered him in the sacrifice offered for him. Think

15. Rm 6:9

carefully of this, dearly beloved, and draw from it a realization of the power the holy sacrifice has to loose the bonds of our hearts, if when one person offered it for another it was able to loose the chains on his body.

Many of you, dearly beloved, know Cassius, bishop of the city of Narni.[7]* It was his practice to offer the sacrifice to God every day, so that scarcely a day of his life passed without his offering God the propitiatory victim. And his life corresponded to the sacrifice: after giving away all that he had in alms, when he came to the time to offer the sacrifice, entirely dissolved in tears he offered himself with great compunction of heart.

I learned of his life and death from a deacon of venerable life whom Cassius had trained. He said that on a certain night the Lord stood by his priest in a vision and said: 'Go and tell your bishop: Continue to act as you are acting; do what you are doing. Don't let your foot or your hand stop working. On the Apostles' day you will come to me, and I will pay you your wages.' The priest arose; but because the day of the Apostles was near, he feared to report to the bishop that the day of his death was so close. The Lord returned on another night, strongly rebuked his disobedience, and repeated his command in the same words. The priest rose intending to go ahead, but again his heart weakened and prevented him from declaring the revelation. He refused to yield to the command, which had already been repeated once, and failed to make known what he had seen.

Because when grace is rejected great anger follows upon former kindness, the Lord appeared for a third time in a vision of punishment. He now added blows to his words, and gave him such a severe beating that the wounds to his body vanquished his stubbornness of heart. He therefore arose, taught by the blows, and proceeded to the bishop whom he found waiting, as was his custom, to offer the eucharistic sacrifice beside the tomb of the blessed martyr Juvenal. He asked to see him apart from those standing around, and prostrated himself at his feet. When the bishop had with difficulty raised the weeping man, he was eager to learn the reason for his tears. The priest, to reveal the course of the vision, first removed the clothing from his shoulders to disclose the blows his body had received. He showed as what I might call witnesses to the truth and to his sin how severely the blows he had received had cut into his body, and the weals they had caused. When the bishop saw them, he was horrified, and inquired with astonishment who had ventured to do such things to him. The priest answered that he had endured them for him. The bishop's amazement and his alarm grew stronger. Without further delay the priest disclosed to him the secret revelation, and told him the words of the Lord's command which he had heard: 'Continue to act as you are acting; do what you are doing. Don't let your hand or your foot stop working. On the Apostles' day you will come to me, and I will pay you your wages.' On hearing this the bishop fell prostrate in prayer, with great compunction of heart; he who had come to offer the eucharistic sacrifice at the third hour postponed it until the ninth, owing to the length of his protracted prayer.

From that day the riches of his devotion increased; he became as steadfast in his work as he was certain of his recompense, and he who had been under obligation to the Lord now began to have the Lord under obligation to him, because of his promise. It had been his practice to go to Rome every year on the Apostles' day. Now, apprehensive because of the revelation, he decided not to go according to habit. He was watchful at the same time during the second year too, and the third, in expectation of his death, and felt the same uncertainty during the fourth, fifth and sixth years. He could almost have lost hope in the truth of the revelation if the blows had not given credit to the words.

In the seventh year he had reached the eve of the awaited feast of the Apostles unharmed, but a slight fever beset him then. His flock was expecting him to carry out the solemn mass on the Apostles' day, but he refused, saying that he could not. But because they were equally apprehensive of his departure from this life, they came to him in a body, binding themselves in a unanimous agreement that they would not take part in the celebration of the solemn mass on that day unless their bishop would be their mediator in the presence of God. Then he, constrained to do so, celebrated mass in the bishop's oratory, and distributed with his own hand the Lord's body, and gave the kiss of peace to all.

When the sacrificial offering had been completed, the bishop returned to his bed. As he lay there, and saw his priests and minsters standing round, he gave them a kind of last farewell. He counseled them concerning the preservation of the bond of love, and commended the great harmony that ought to unite them. In the midst of these words of exhortation he suddenly cried out in a terrible voice, 'It is the hour,' and immediately gave with his own hands to those standing by him the linen cloth which according to custom is placed over the face of the dying. When it was in place he sent forth his spirit, and so the holy soul, reaching eternal joys, was freed from the corruption of the body.

Whom, dearly beloved, did that man imitate in his death if not the one he had contemplated during his lifetime? When he said, 'It is the hour', he went forth from his body. Jesus too, when everything had been completed and he had said, *'It is finished', bowed his head and gave up his spirit.*[16] What the Lord did because of his power, his servant did because of his call.

See what great peace and grace the delegation made up of the daily sacrifice, sent with almsgiving and tears, brought about with the king who was on his way! Let one who can do so abandon everything, but let one who cannot do this send a delegation of his tears and his almsgiving while the king is still some distance away, and let him offer the gift

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16. Jn 19:30

of the sacrifice. The one who knows that we cannot bear his wrath wants to be appeased by our prayers. The delay in his coming shows that he is awaiting a delegation of peace. He would have come already if he had wanted to, and would have slaughtered all his adversaries. He reveals how fearful he will be when he comes, and yet that he is slow to come, since he does not want to find any to punish.[8]*

So therefore, everyone of you who does not renounce all that he possesses cannot be my disciple. And yet he bestows the remedy of the salvation we are to hope for. He whom we cannot endure because of his anger desires to be appeased by the delegation of peace he has begged for. And so you must wash away the stains of your sins with your tears, dearly beloved, you must wipe them away with your almsgiving, and atone for them with the holy sacrifice. You must not possess by desiring them the things you have not yet abandoned because you need to use them. Put your hope in your Redeemer alone. Pass in your heart to your eternal homeland. If you possess nothing in this world by your love for it, even though you have possessions you have abandoned everything. May he who has bestowed upon us the remedies for eternal peace grant us longed-for joys, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.

NOTES

1. Homily 37 in Migne (*PL* 1275). Both Bu and W assign this pericope to August 22, for the Roman martyr, Timothy, while N and Bu simply assign it to the mass commemorating any martyr. The homily itself gives no indication of the occasion on which it might have been preached.
2. This paragraph, with the exception of three short sentences towards the middle, is used by Bede in his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 281, 2027 - 282, 2046).
3. A derivation of a Hebrew word taken from Saint Jerome's *Interpretation of Hebrew Names* (CC 72: 110, 6/7).

4. This sentence and the six following paragraphs—with the omission of several sentences—are incorporated by Bede in his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 282, 2047 - 283, 2111).
5. A sentence in which Gregory associates *crux* (cross) with *cruciatus* (torment) is omitted as it has no point in English.
6. This same story, in almost identical language, was repeated by Gregory in his *Dialogues* 4:57.
7. Gregory gives a shorter account of the death of Cassius, Bishop of Narni, in *Dialogues* 4:56.
8. A sentence, *Sed reatus nobis contemptus nostri denuntiat dicens* ('But the guilt of our disdain declares to us, saying':) is omitted as meaningless in this context.

homily 38

The kingdom of heaven is like a king who made a marriage feast for his son. And he sent servants out to call the guests to the wedding, and they refused to come. Again, he sent out other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited. See, I have prepared my meal; my oxen and my fatlings have been slain, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding.' But they paid no heed and went off, one to his farm, another to his business. The rest seized his servants, and, having insulted them, slew them. But when the king learning about this, he was furious and sent his armies, destroyed those murderers and set fire to their city. Then he said to his servants: 'The marriage feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore into the byroads and call to the marriage feast everyone you find there.' And his servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, bad and good, and the marriage feast was filled with guests. But the king came in to look at the guests, and saw there a person who was not clothed in a wedding garment. And he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?' He was speechless. Then the king said to the attendants: 'Bind him feet and hands and cast him into the outer darkness, where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen.'

(Matthew 22.2-14)[1]*

I want, if possible, to go over the text of the gospel lesson quickly, dearly beloved. Then at the end of it I may be able to speak more at length. But first we must ask whether this lesson in Matthew is what Luke[1] describes as a dinner, since some details appear inconsistent: here it is a midday meal, there a dinner; here the one who came into the marriage feast improperly dressed was cast out, and there none of those said to have entered is shown to have been cast out. From this we can infer that in this passage the marriage feast represents the Church of the present time, and the dinner in Luke represents the final and eternal banquet. Some who enter the one will leave it, but no one who has once entered the other will later go out. But if anyone argues that it is the same lesson, I think it better to save the faith and yield to another's interpretation than to give in to strife. Perhaps we can reasonably take it that Luke kept silent about the man Matthew said came without a marriage garment and was thrown out; that one called it a dinner and the other a midday meal does not stand in the way of my interpretation, because when the ancients took their daily midday meal at the ninth hour it was also called a dinner.

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[1] Lk 14:16–24

I recall that I have already told you often that in the holy gospel the Church of the present time is frequently called the kingdom of heaven. A gathering of the righteous is said to be the kingdom of heaven.[2*] Since the Lord says through the prophet that *Heaven is my throne,*[2] and Solomon that *The soul of the righteous is the throne of wisdom,*[3] and Paul that *Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God,*[4] clearly we must infer that if God is wisdom, and the soul of the righteous is wisdom's throne, and we call heaven God's throne, then heaven must be the soul of the righteous. Hence the psalmist says of holy preachers, *The heavens declare the glory of God.*[5] So the Church of the righteous is the kingdom of heaven. As their hearts embrace nothing on earth, because they long for what is on high the Lord is already reigning in them as he does in heaven.

And so it can be said: *The kingdom of heaven is like a king who made a marriage feast for his son.*[3*] You already understand, dear brothers and sisters, the identity of the king who is father of a son who is also a king. Surely it is the one to whom the psalmist says: *O God, give your judgment to the king, and your righteousness to the kings's son.*[6]

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[2] Is 66:1 [3] Pr 12:23 (LXX) [4] 1 Co 1:24 [5] Ps 19:1 (V 18:2)

Who made a marriage feast for his son.[4*] God the Father made a marriage feast for God the Son when he united him to a human nature in the Virgin's womb, when he desired him who was God before the ages to become a human being at the end of the ages.[5*] Because such a union customarily takes place between two persons, we must keep ourselves from believing that the person God-and-man, our Redeemer Jesus Christ, is the union of two persons. We do indeed say that he exists from and in two natures, but we avoid as sinful the belief that he has been made up of two persons.

[6*]A clearer and safer thing to say is that the Father made a marriage feast for his Son by joining the Church to him through the mystery of his incarnation. The womb of the Virgin who bore him was the bridal chamber of this bridegroom, and so the psalmist says: *He has set his tent in the sun, and he is like a bridegroom coming forth from his bridal chamber.*[7] He truly came forth like a bridegroom from his bridal chamber who, as God incarnate, left the inviolate womb of the Virgin to unite the Church to himself.

And so he sent his servants to invite his friends to the marriage feast. He sent once, and he sent again, because first he made the prophets, and later the apostles, preachers of the Lord's incarnation. He sent his servants twice with the invitation, because he said through the prophets that his only Son's incarnation would come about, and he proclaimed through the apostles that it had.

Because those who were first invited to the marriage banquet refused to come, he said in his second invitation: *See, I have prepared my meal; my oxen and fatlings have been slain, and everything is ready.* What do we take the oxen and fatlings to be but the fathers of the Old and New Testaments? Since I am speaking to everyone, I must also explain these words of the gospel reading. We call animals fatlings when they are well fed; fatlings have been fattened up.[7]*

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[6] Ps 72:1 (V 71:2)

[7] Ps 19:4-5 (V 18:6)

It was written in the Law, *You shall love your friend and hate your enemy.*[8] At that time permission was granted to the righteous to put down the enemies of God and their own with as much strength as they had, and to strike them down with the power of life and death.[8]* There is no doubt that this is forbidden in the New Testament: Truth himself tells us, *Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you.*[9] What then do the oxen represent but the fathers of the Old Testament? When the Law consented to their killing their adversaries in return for their hatred, if I may say so, what else were they but oxen striking down their enemies with the horn of their physical strength? And what do the fatlings signify but the fathers of the New Testament? When they receive the gift of inner fatness, they flee their earthly desires and are raised to the heights on the wings of their contemplation.[9]* What else is having your thoughts on low things but a kind of mental leanness? But there are those who through their understanding of heavenly things are now being nourished by their holy desire for the things of heaven. Receiving the food of inner delight, they are being fattened, so to speak, with a more abundant sustenance. The psalmist was longing to be well-fed with this fatness when he said: *May my soul be filled as with marrow and fat!*[10]

Because the preachers sent to proclaim the Lord's incarnation, first the prophets and later the holy apostles, endured the persecution of unbelievers, it was said to those who were invited but refused to come, *My oxen and fatlings have been slain, and everything is ready,* meaning, 'Reflect on the deaths of the fathers who went before you, and think about correcting your lives.' We should note that in the first invitation nothing was said about oxen and fatlings, but in the second they are said to be already slaughtered. When we refuse to listen to his words, almighty God adds examples, so that we may more easily hope for everything we believe to be impossible, the more that we hear that others have already accomplished it.

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[8] Lv 19:18; Mt 5:43 [9] Lk 6:27 [10] Ps 63:5 (V 62:6)

But they paid no heed and went off, one to his farm, another to his business. To go to your farm is to involve yourself excessively in earthly toil; to go to your business is to long for the gain brought by our worldly activity. One person is concerned with earthly toil, another devoted to the activity of this world: they take no notice of the mystery of the Lord's incarnation, and are unwilling to live in accordance with it. As if they are proceeding to their farm or business, they refuse to come to the marriage feast of the king. Frequently, and this is a more serious matter, some not only decline the gift of the One calling them but even persecute those who accept it. And so he adds: *The rest seized his servants, and, having insulted them, slew them.*

But the *king,* learning of this, *sent his armies, destroyed those murderers and set fire to their city.* He *destroys the murderers* because he has slain the persecutors; he *sets fire to their city* because not their souls alone, but even the bodies in which they had dwelt, are tormented by the eternal flames of hell. It is said that he *sent his armies* and did away with the murderers because all judgment is executed among human beings by the angels. What are these bands of angels but our King's armies? And so this King is called the Lord Sabaoth, since Sabaoth means 'armies'.[10*] He sends his armies to destroy his adversaries because the Lord administers punishment through the angels.

Our fathers heard of the force of this punishment; we now behold it. Where are the proud persecutors of the martyrs? Where are those who rose up against their Creator, who swelled up from the deadly desire for this world's honors? You see how the death of the martyrs is flowering in the faith of the living! Those who boasted of their cruelty to them never come to our minds, even among the dead. And so we acknowledge the actuality of what we heard in the parables.

But the one who sees himself despised when he issues the invitations will not have the marriage feast of his son the king empty. He sends for others, because although God's word is in danger from some, it will find a place to come to rest. *Then he said to his servants: The marriage feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore into the byroads, and call to the marriage feast everyone you find.* If we take the roads in holy Scripture to mean our actions, we interpret the byroads as our failed actions. Often those who meet no prosperity in their earthly actions come readily to God.

And his servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, bad and good, and the marriage feast was filled with guests. The character of those at the banquet reveals clearly that the king's marriage feast represents the Church of this time, in which the bad are present along with the good. The Church is a thorough mix of a variety of offspring. She brings them all forth to the faith, but does not lead them all to the liberty of spiritual grace successfully by changes in their lives, since their sins prevent it. As long as we are living in this world we have to proceed along the road of the present age thoroughly mixed together. We shall be separated when we reach our goal. Only the good are in heaven, and only the bad are in hell. This life is situated between heaven and hell. It goes on in the middle, so to speak, and takes in the citizens of both parts. The Church admits them now without distinguishing them, but separates them later when they leave this life.

If you are good, then, bear patiently with the bad as long as you remain alive. Anyone who does not bear with the bad is a witness against himself through his intolerance that he himself is not good. The person not trained by Cain in evil is declining to be Abel. On the threshing floor the grains of wheat are pressed down beneath the straw. Flowers spring up amidst briers. The fragrant rose grows along with piercing thorns.

The first man had two sons: one was chosen, the other rejected.[11] The ark held three sons:[12] of these two were chosen, and one rejected.[13] Abraham had two sons: one was chosen, the other rejected.[14] Isaac had two sons: one was chosen, the other rejected.[15] Jacob had twelve sons: one of them was sold on account of his innocence, the others on account of their wickedness sold their brother.[16] Twelve apostles were chosen: mixed together was one who would test, and eleven who would be tested.[17] Seven deacons were ordained by the apostles:[18] six of them remained orthodox in their faith, one[11*] became a source of error.[19] In the Church, then, there can be no bad without good, nor good without bad.

Dearly beloved, before your time is over bring these examples to mind, and strengthen yourselves to bear with the bad. If we are offspring of the chosen, it remains for us to walk by their example. The good did not refuse to bear with the bad. Job declared of himself, *I was a brother of serpents and a companion of ostriches.*[20] Solomon, in the voice of the bridegroom said, of the Church, *As a lily among briers, so is my love among the maidens.*[21] The Lord told Ezekiel, *Son of man, unbelievers and rebels are with you, and you live with scorpions.*[22] Peter praised the life of blessed Lot, saying: *And he rescued righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the lawless lives of the wicked; for he was righteous in respect to his sight and hearing, and lived among those who tormented his righteous soul day after day by their wicked deeds.*[23] Paul both praised and strengthened the life of his disciples by telling them, You are *in the midst of a crooked and perverse people, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life.*[24] John testified to the church at Pergamum: *I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is; you hold fast my name, and did not deny my faith.*[25] You see, dearly beloved, how in nearly

[11] Gn 4:1-5
[12] Gn 6:10
[13] Gn 9:24-27
[14] Gn 21:10-12
[15] Gn 27:27-37
[16] Gn 37:27-28
[17] Mt 10:2-4; 26:47-56
[18] Ac 6:5-6
[19] Rv 2:6
[20] Jb 30:29
[21] Sg 2:2
[22] Ezk 2:6
[23] 2 P 2:7-8
[24] Ph 2:15-16
[25] Rv 2:13

all the examples we have run through we recognize no good person who was not tested by the wickedness of the bad. If I may say so, the sword of our soul does not acquire a keen, sharp edge unless another's wickedness has honed it.

That there are many in the Church who are bad and few who are good should not frighten you.[26] The ark in the floodwaters, which was a type or image of our Church, was spacious below and narrow above; it narrowed to a cubit at the top.[27] We believe that it contained four-footed and creeping animals below, and birds and human beings above. Where it contained the wild animals it was wide, where it kept human beings safe it was narrow. This was because the Church is spacious in respect to the materialistic, narrow in respect to the spiritual. Where it bears with people's brutish habits it is more capacious, but where it holds those borne on their spiritual reason it does indeed rise to the top but, because these are few, it narrows. *Truly, the way is wide that leads to destruction, and they are many who go along it; narrow is the one that leads to life, and they are few who find it.*[28]

The ark became narrow at the top, down to one cubit, because in the Church the holier people are the fewer they are. The ark narrowed down at the top to him who was one among all, incomparable, born holy, since in the words of the psalmist, he is *like a lonely sparrow on the building.*[29] Therefore we must bear with the bad even though they are more numerous, since on the threshing floor the grains of wheat we store in the barns are few, and the heaps of straw we burn in the fire are huge.

But since you have already come into the house of the marriage feast, our holy Church, as a result of God's generosity, be careful, my friends, lest when the King enters he find fault with some aspect of your heart's clothing. We must consider what comes next with great fear in our hearts: *But the king came in to look at the guests, and saw there a person not clothed in a wedding garment.*

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[26] 1 P 3:20–21
[27] Gn 6:14–16
[28] Mt 7:13–14
[29] Ps 102:7 (V 101:8)

What do we think is meant by the wedding garment, dearly beloved? For if we say it is baptism or faith, is there anyone who has entered this marriage feast without them? A person is outside because he has not yet come to believe. What then must we understand by the wedding garment but love? That person enters the marriage feast, but without wearing a wedding garment, who is present in the holy Church, and has faith, but does not have love. We are correct when we say that love is the wedding garment because this is what our Creator himself possessed when he came to the marriage feast to join the Church to himself. Only God's love brought it about that his only-begotten Son united the hearts of his chosen to himself. John says that *God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son for us.*[30]

And so the One who came to us out of love made known that this love is the wedding garment. Every one of you who belongs to the Church, who has believed in God, has already come in to the marriage feast; but he has not come in a wedding garment unless he preserves the gift of love. And surely, my friends, if any one of you was invited to a marriage feast, he would change his clothing and show by his dress how he rejoices with the bridegroom and bride; he would be ashamed to appear in contemptible clothing among those rejoicing and celebrating the festive occasion. We come to God's marriage feast and do not care to change the clothing our hearts wear. The angels rejoice, the chosen are taken up to heaven! In what frame of mind do we look upon this spiritual feast if we do not possess the wedding garment, love, that is alone becoming?

We should be aware that just as clothing is woven with two pieces of wool, an upper and a lower, so there are two commandments of love, love of God, and of our neighbor. It is written that *you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength, and you shall love your neighbor as yourself.*[31] We should note that a measure is given for the love of our neighbor when we are told: *You shall love your neighbor as yourself;* but no measure binds the love of God: *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.* We are not given a measure of love, but told how we are to love: *with all* we are. That person truly loves God who retains nothing of himself for himself. Anyone concerned to possess a wedding garment at the marriage feast must keep these two commandments of love.

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[30] Jn 3:16

[31] Mk 12:30–31

This is why in the book of Ezekiel the porch of the gate of the city on a mountain measured two cubits.[32] Surely no access to the heavenly city is given us if we do not keep the love of God and neighbor in this Church, which because it is outside is called a porch. This is why it was ordered that the curtains of the tabernacle be woven from scarlet cloth twice-dyed.[33] You, my friends, you are the curtains of the tabernacle, since by your faith you veil the heavenly secrets in your hearts. Scarlet twice-dyed must be used for the curtains of the tabernacle. Scarlet has the look of fire, and what is love but fire? This love must be twice-dyed, dyed by love of God, and dyed by love of our neighbor. A person who so loves God that, because of his contemplation of him he neglects his neighbor, is indeed scarlet, but he has not been twice-dyed; and the same is true of a person who so loves his neighbor that he neglects the contemplation of God because of his love. So that your love can be scarlet twice-dyed, let it inflame you toward love of God and toward love of your neighbor. Then you will not neglect the contemplation of God out of sympathy for your neighbor, nor cling more than you should to the contemplation of God and so reject sympathy for your neighbor. Everyone living among others must long for the One he desires without deserting the one he runs with; he must help his companion without losing interest in the One toward whom he is hurrying.

[32] Ezk 40:9 [33] Ex 26:1

We should be aware that the love of our neighbor is divided into two commandments, since a certain wise man says, *See that you do not do to another anything you hate having done to you,*[34] and Truth himself preaches, *What you wish that people would do to you, do you also the same to them.*[35] If we impart to others what we properly want to have accorded us, and if we avoid doing to others what we do not wish to have done to us, we shall be keeping the rights of love unharmed. But no one should think that when he loves someone or other he immediately possesses love. He must first examine the motives of his love. If some one loves another, but not for God's sake, he does not have love but only considers that he has. Love is true when we love a friend in God and an enemy for the sake of God. A person loves for God's sake those whom he loves if he knows how to love even those who do not love him. We prove our love only when it is opposed to hatred, and so the Lord himself tells us: *Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you.*[36] He is holy, and loves, who for the sake of God loves even one he realizes does not love him.

These are great and profound matters, difficult to present to many; and yet this is the wedding garment. Let one who is present at the wedding feast without it be anxious, and fear being cast out when the king enters. It is said, *The king came in to the marriage feast to look at the guests, and saw there a person not clothed in a wedding garment.* We, my friends, are those guests at the marriage feast of the word, we are in the Church and have faith, we are nourished by the food of holy Scripture, we rejoice that the Church is united to God. I ask you to consider whether you have come to this marriage feast with a wedding garment. Search your thoughts carefully. Examine your hearts about each separate matter, whether you hate anyone, whether you kindle envy of someone else's good fortune within yourselves, whether you are hurrying to harm someone out of a secret malice.

34. Tb 4:16 35. Mt 7:12 36. Lk 6:27

The king is entering the marriage feast. He contemplates the condition of our hearts. He immediately becomes angry, and says to the person he does not find clothed with love, *Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?* We must wonder, dearly beloved, that he calls him friend, and also shows his disapproval of him. It is as if were saying to him, 'Friend and not a friend; friend because of your faith, not a friend because of your actions.' *But he was silent.* I say this sadly: in the strict and final chastisement every excuse is ineffective; he rebukes us openly, who as a witness of our inner consciousness calls us to account. But in all this we must keep in mind that one clothed in virtue, but imperfectly, should not lose his hope of pardon at the entry of the merciful king. He himself gives us hope, through the psalmist: *Your eyes have seen my imperfections, and they shall all be written in your book.*[37]

But since I have said these few things as a solace for those who have love but are weak, let me now speak of one who lacks it entirely. *Then the king said to his attendants: Bind him feet and hands and cast him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.* A strict judgment will bind the feet and hands of those who are now unwilling to be bound from wicked works by the amendment of their lives. Certainly punishment will bind those whom sin has held bound from good works. The feet of those who neglect to visit the sick are bound; the hands of those who bestow nothing freely now on the needy are bound from good work. Those who are now willingly bound in vice will then be unwillingly bound in punishment.

It is correctly said that this man is to be cast forth into *outer darkness.* We call blindness of heart inner darkness, and the eternal night of condemnation outer darkness. The condemned are cast into outer, not inner, darkness, because one who fell willingly into blindness of heart in this life will be cast forth unwillingly into the night of condemnation in the next. It is related that there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Those who took pleasure in eating in this life will gnash their teeth then; eyes which were busy with forbidden desires here will weep then. Every individual member which was subjected and enslaved to every individual vice here will be subjected to punishment.

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[37] Ps 139:16 (V 138:16)

But after this one person who represents the entire body of the wicked was ejected, a general judgment is immediately added: *For many are called, but few are chosen.* What we hear, dearly beloved, is truly dreadful. All of us have been called, all of us have come to the marriage feast of the heavenly King. We believe and confess the mystery of his incarnation. We partake of the banquet of the divine word. The King will come in on the coming day of judgment. We know we have been called; we do not know whether we have been chosen. Each of us must disparage himself in humility in proportion to his ignorance of whether or not he has been chosen. Some start nothing good; some do not persist in the good they have begun. We see one person spending almost his entire life in wickedness, but toward its end his sorrow and strict repentance call him back from it. Another seems to be leading the life of a chosen one, yet it comes about that he turns aside toward its end to wicked error. One makes a good start and a better ending; another plunges into evil actions at an early age, and finishes in the same, always becoming worse. Everyone should be anxious and fearful for himself the more ignorant he is of what is in store for him, because—this must be said often and not forgotten—*Many are called, but few are chosen.*

The example of the faithful often transforms the hearts of listeners more than a teacher's words. I want to tell you of something recent, which your hearts may take in with more dread as it reaches them from a nearer point. I am not speaking of things that took place long ago, but of those which were witnessed by people I recall recounting that they had been involved in them.

[12]*My father had three sisters, and all three were consecrated virgins. One was named Tarsilla, the second Gorgiana, and the third Emiliana. They were all transformed by the same passion for the religious life, and they were all consecrated at the same time. They spent their lives together, living in their own home under strict regular discipline.

When they had continued for a long time in this way of life, Tarsilla and Emiliana began to progress daily in love for their Creator. As though only their bodies were here on earth, their hearts began to pass over daily to eternal things. Gorgiana, though, began to grow tepid, decreasing every day from the warmth of her inner love, and gradually returning to love of this world. Tarsilla said frequently to her sister Emiliana, with great sorrow, 'I see that our sister Gorgiana is not of our way of thinking. I observe that her thoughts turn outward, and that her heart is not guarding what she has purposed.' They took care daily by gentle persuasion to win her back, and to change her frivolous habits to their own serious practices. She would indeed quickly resume her serious mien while they were persuading her, but as soon as their persuasion and the seriousness it brought about had passed, she returned to her frivolous conversation. She took pleasure in the company of young lay women, and found every person not devoted to this world tiresome.

On a certain night my ancestor Felix, who was bishop of this Roman church, appeared in a vision to my aunt, Tarsilla. She herself described it. Among her sisters she had increased in the power of uninterrupted prayer, zealous self-denial and exceptional abstinence, in the seriousness of her admirable life, and in the esteem and height of holiness. He showed her the dwelling of unending splendor and said: 'Come, because I am going to receive you into this dwelling of light.' Soon afterwards she was seized with a fever, and arrived at her last day. Many came together at her bedside, as noble men and women were accustomed to do, to console their relatives. At the hour of her departure many men and women stood round about her bed, among them my mother. Suddenly she looked up and saw Jesus coming. With great earnestness she began to cry out to those standing around, 'Go, go, Jesus has come!' As that holy soul was gazing at the One she saw, it was freed from her flesh. A great and wonderful fragrance was suddenly spread about, and its sweetness showed to everyone there that the Originator of this sweetness had come. When her body had been undressed for the customary washing, the skin on her elbows and knees was found to have become as tough as camels' skin from her long practice of prayer. Her dead body bore witness to what her living spirit had been.

This happened before the day of the Lord's birth. Soon after it, Tarsilla appeared to her sister Emiliana in a vision during the night, and said: 'Come! I have celebrated the day of the Lord's birth without you; I will celebrate his holy Epiphany with you.' Emiliana, immediately thinking of her sister Gorgiana's salvation, answered: 'And if I come alone, to whose care shall I entrust our sister Gorgiana?' Tarsilla spoke to her again, with a sad countenance: 'Come! Our sister Gorgiana has been relegated to the laity.' An illness followed soon after this vision. As had been said, her illness grew worse, and she died before the day of the Lord's epiphany.

As soon as Gorgiana realized that she alone remained, her perversity increased. The desires that were formerly hidden in her thoughts she now carried out in wicked deeds. She forgot her fear of the Lord, she forgot shame and reverence, she forgot her consecration, and later she married the steward of her land. All three were originally transformed by a single passion for the religious life, but they did not all persist in one and the same pursuit. According to the Lord's words, *Many are called, but few are chosen.*

I have said these things so that no one now occupied in good works may attribute the strength with which he does them to himself. No one should depend on his own actions, because although he knows what he is today, he does not know what he will be tomorrow. Let no one rejoice in the security of good works: while he is still in the uncertainty of this life he does not know what end may follow.

Since I have recounted something in which the strictness of divine judgment has terrified you, I shall tell you a recent event to comfort your terrified hearts with divine mercy. I recall that I have already spoken about this in another homily, but you were not present then.[13]*

[14]*Two years ago a certain brother came by the grace of conversion to my monastery, which is situated beside the church of the blessed martyrs John and Paul. He was tested according to the rule, and eventually received. His brother followed him into the monastery, not from any desire for conversion but out of affection for him. Now the one who had come to lead the monastic life was most agreeable to the brothers, but his brother was very different in his way of life and habits. He lived in the monastery from necessity rather than of his own free will. Although he was unruly in all his actions, everyone bore with him calmly for his brother's sake. He was frivolous in his speech, misguided in his actions, careful about his dress, careless about his way of life. He could not bear it if anyone spoke to him of monastic life. His life had become a burden to all the brothers, but, as I have said, they all put up with him for the sake of his brother. He was scornful if anyone spoke to him about his bad behavior; not only did he hate doing good deeds, but even hearing about them. By swearing, by anger, by scoffing, he declared that he would never come to the practice of monastic life.

In the plague that recently killed a large part of the people of this city, his groin was affected, and he came close to death. As he was breathing his last, the brothers gathered to palliate his departure by their prayers. His body had lost all feeling in its extremities, and only the life-giving breath remained in his chest. As the brothers saw that his end was coming nearer, they began to pray more strenuously for him. Suddenly he began to cry out with all the strength he could muster to the brothers standing about him, and to interrupt their prayers, saying: 'Get back! I've been given up to a dragon to be devoured, but it cannot devour me because of your presence. It already has my head in its mouth! Give it room, that it may no longer torture me but may accomplish what it is about to do. If I've been given up to it to be devoured, why are you holding it back?'

Then the brothers began to say to him: 'What are you saying, brother? Sign yourself with the cross!' He answered as well as he could, 'I want to sign myself but I can't because the dragon prevents me.' When the brothers heard this they fell prostrate on the ground; with tears they began to pray more urgently for his release. Suddenly the sick man became better! He began to rejoice with what strength he had: 'Thanks be to God! See, the dragon which had taken me to devour me has fled, he has been driven away by your prayers, he couldn't stay! Now intercede for my sins, because I am ready to be converted and to abandon completely my worldly way of life.'

And so the man who, as I described him, had lost all feeling in his extremities, was restored to life, and turned with his whole heart to God. Instructed by long and continuous suffering during his sickness, he died a few days later, when his illness had grown worse. This time he saw no dragon as he died, because he had conquered it by his change of heart. You see, dearly beloved, how Gorgiana, whom I spoke about earlier, from living a meritorious religious life declined into punishment, and how this brother, about whom I have just spoken, returned from the verge of death to eternal life.

No one knows what may happen to him in the hidden judgment of God, because *Many are called, but few are chosen*. Since no one is certain in his own case whether or not he is chosen, it remains that all should be anxious, all fearful concerning their deeds, all rejoicing in the divine mercy alone. No one should be confident in his own virtues.

One there is who may make our confidence strong, he who deigned to take upon himself our nature, who lives and reigns with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.

NOTES

1. Homily 38 in Migne (*PL* 1282). Aside from a note in the margin of Bu (which may have been added later) saying that this pericope was to be read on Friday of the second week in Lent, there is no indication, either in the homily or in the gospel books, as to when it might have been used.
2. Gregory may have taken the idea that both heaven, and the soul of a righteous person, are the seat or throne of God, so that the Church of the present time can be called in some sense the kingdom of heaven, from Saint Augustine's *Commentary on Psalm* 46:9 [JB 47:8] (CC 38: 535, 11/23). Saint Bernard knew either Augustine's or Gregory's work, or both: see *Sermones super Cantica* 27, 5, 8 (*S. Bernardi Opera* I: 187, 12–188, 6); *Sermones per annum, in adventu* 3 (*ibid.* IV: 177, 24–178, 1); *in purificatione S. Mariae* 1 (*ibid.* 337, 14–338, 3).
3. There two sentences may have been inspired by Saint Augustine's *Commentary on Psalm* 71:2 [JB 72:1] (CC 39: 972, 4/6).
4. A single sentence that again may be attributed to Saint Augustine's *Commentary on the First Letter of John* (*PL* 35: 1979).
5. In the latter part of this sentence and in the sentence that follows the influence of Saint Augustine's *Sermons,* 184 (*PL* 38:995), 185 (*PL* 999), and 189 (*PL* 1006) may be detected.
6. The ideas presented in these four sentences may also have been taken from Saint Augustine: see his *Commentary on Psalm* 18:6 [JB 19:4–5] (CC 38: 109, 25/27) and from his *Sermon* 190 (*PL* 38: 1007/1008).
7. Gregory here associates the noun *altilia,* 'fatlings', with the verb *alere,* 'to feed well, fatten up'.
8. *Jus (iure) gladii,* the power of life and death, *Digesta* 1, 18, 6, 58.
9. These four sentences were inserted by Bede in his *Commentary on Mark* (CC 120: 615, 783/88).
10. Another meaning of a Hebrew word taken from Saint Jerome's *Interpretation of Hebrew Names* (CC 72: 105, 20).
11. Gregory is obviously here associating Nicolaus, one of the seven first deacons chosen by the apostles (Acts 6:5) with the founder of the sect known as the Nicolaitans, who are referred to in Rv 2:6.
12. Gregory repeated this story about his three sisters in his *Dialogues* 4:16, but in a much shorter version.
13. Gregory's homily 11.
14. The story about the young monk Theodore is also told again in Gregory's *Dialogues* 4:38.

homily 39

> *And as he was drawing near, seeing the city, he wept over it, saying: 'If only you had known, at least on this, your day, the things that make for your peace. But now they are hidden from your eyes. For the time is coming when your enemies shall put a trench around you and surround you and hem you in on every side. And they will hurl you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation.' Then he entered the temple and began to drive out of it those selling and buying, saying to them: 'It is written that my house is a house of prayer, but you have made it a robbers' den.' And he was teaching daily in the temple, but the chief priests and the scribes and the leader of the people sought to destroy him.*
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> (Luke 19:41-47)[1]*

I want to run through this short reading from the holy gospel succinctly, if I can, to provide a fuller understanding for those who know how to draw many thoughts out of a few words.[2]* No one who has read the story of the destruction of Jerusalem brought about by the Roman rulers Vespasian and Titus is ignorant that it occasioned the Lord's weeping. The Lord is indicating the Roman rulers when he says, *For the days will come upon you when your enemies will surround you with a rampart; they will surround you and hem you in on every side, and they will hurl you to the ground, and your children who are within you.* And when he adds, *And they will not leave in you one stone upon another,* he is testifying to the deportation of the city. Jerusalem is now built outside the gate where the Lord was crucified, and its former site has been, as he said it would be, completely overthrown.

The sin that caused this overthrowing to be inflicted as a punishment was: *because you did not know the time of your* *visitation.*[3]* The Creator of all things condescended to visit the city through the mystery of his incarnation, but the city did not recollect its fear and love of him. Hence the prophet brings the birds of heaven as witnesses to rebuke the human heart when he says: *The hawk in heaven has known its time, the turtledove, swallow and stork have kept the time of their coming, but my people has not known the Lord's judgment!*[1]

But we must first ask what this text means: *Seeing the city, he wept over it, saying: If only you at least had known. . .*[4]* Our loving Redeemer wept over the downfall of the faithless city, a downfall it did not know was to come upon it. When the Lord, weeping, said *If only you,* who are happy now because you are ignorant of what is impending, *had known,* you must understand: 'you would have wept'. And so he continues: . . . *the things that make for your peace on this your day.* While it was giving itself over to material pleasures, not foreseeing the evils to come, it had on its own day the things which could make for its peace. The Lord makes clear why it held that present goods would make for its peace: *But now they are hidden from your eyes.* If the impending evils had not been hidden from the eyes of its heart, it would not have been happy in its present prosperity. And the punishment impending at the hands of the Romans, as I have already said, soon followed.

Let us listen to what the Lord did after he had said these things: *Then he entered the temple and began to drive out of it those selling and buying, saying to them: It is written that my house is a house of prayer, but you have made it a robbers' den.*[5]* He who described the evils to come, and immediately entered the temple to drive out of it those selling and buying, made known that the people's downfall arose principally from the sins of the priests. He described its destruction, and scourged those selling and buying in the temple, and in this execution of his work showed whence the root of its annihilation proceeded. We have learned from the tes-

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1. Jr 8:7

timony of another evangelist that doves were sold in the temple.[2] What do we understand by doves but the gift of the Holy Spirit? He expelled those selling and buying from the temple because he was condemning both those who were granting the imposition of hands for a fee, and those who were endeavoring to buy the gift of the Spirit.

Of the temple he says: *My house is a house of prayer, but you have made it a robbers' den.*[6]* There is no doubt that those who resided in the temple to receive gifts sought to do harm to those who did not give anything. The house of prayer had become a robbers' den because it was known that those assisting in the temple were there either to do physical harm to those who did not offer gifts, or to inflict spiritual death on those who did. But our Redeemer does not take his preaching away from those who are unworthy and ungrateful. After demonstrating the power of his discipline by driving out those in error, he straightway showed the gift of his grace: *And he was teaching daily in the temple.*

I have completed the literal explanation of these things, going over them briefly. But we know that Jerusalem has already been overthrown, and transformed into something better by its overthrow; we know that the robbers have been banished from the temple, and the temple itself torn down. Since this is so, we must extract some inner similitude from these external events; these overthrown buildings must cause us to fear the ruin of our lives. For *seeing the city, he wept over it, saying, If only you at least had known.*[7]* He did this once when he proclaimed that the city would perish. Our Redeemer has not stopped doing this daily through his elect when he observes that certain persons have adopted corrupt habits after having lived good lives. He mourns for those who do not know why they are mourned for, who, in Solomon's words, *rejoice in doing evil, and delight in what is worse.*[3] If they recognized their impending condemnation, they would mourn for themselves with the tears of the elect.

[2] Mt 21:12   [3] Pr 2:14

The thought which follows well befits a soul that is going to perish: *And the things that make for your peace on this your day; but now they are hidden from your eyes.* The errant soul which rejoices in fleeting time has here its own day. The things that make for its peace are present for it. When it enjoys temporal affairs, is overwhelmed with honors, relaxes in physical pleasure, feels no dread of coming punishment, it has peace in its own day. It will have a serious reason for offense, its condemnation on Another's day. Then when the righteous will rejoice, it will have to be miserable. Everything which makes not for its peace will be turned into bitter vexation; it will begin to be vexed with itself as to why it did not dread the condemnation it suffers, why it closed its inner eyes so as not to foresee the evils that would come after.

And so it is said, *But now they are hidden from your eyes.* An errant soul, given over to present affairs, and enfeebled by earthly pleasures, hides the coming evils from itself. It shrinks from anticipating future things which might disturb its present happiness. When it abandons itself to the delights of the present life, what else is it doing but rushing into the fire with its eyes closed? And so it is written: *In a day of good things be not forgetful of the evil.*[4] Paul says, *Let those who rejoice be as those who are not rejoicing.*[5] If there is any happiness to be derived from the present time, we must so enjoy it that the severity of the judgment to follow may never be far from our memories. When a fearful mind is pierced with dread of final punishment, to the extent that we temper our present happiness, so do we temper the anger that is to come later. It is written: *Happy is the person who is never without fear; but he who hardens his heart falls into evil.*[6] 8* We will feel greater distress at the wrath of the judgment to follow the less we now fear it amid our sins.

*For the days will come upon you when your enemies will surround you with a rampart.*9* What greater enemies does a human soul ever have than the wicked spirits? After they have cultivated it with illusory delights when it is occupied with physical love, they lay siege to it as it goes forth from its body. They surround it with a rampart, bringing back before its inner eyes the wicked deeds it has committed. They drag and coerce it into companionship with their own condemnation. They want it to see at the very end of life the kind of enemies that have entrapped and ensnared it, yet without the possibility of finding a way of escape. It is no longer allowed to perform the good works it refused to perform when it could.

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[4] Si 11:25 (V 11:27) [5] 1 Co 7:30 [6] Pr 28:14

We can also interpret what follows of them: *They will surround you and hem you in on every side.* The wicked spirits oppress the soul on every side when they reveal to it its iniquities, not only of deeds, but even of speech, and of thought. The soul which once spread itself out in many directions in wickedness is finally oppressed in every way in retribution.

And they will hurl you to the ground, and your children who are within you. The soul is hurled to the ground by the perception of its guilt when the body, which it believed to be its life, is forced to return to dust. Its children perish in death when the forbidden thoughts, which presently issue from it, are destroyed in life's final punishment. It is written: *On that day all their thoughts shall perish.*[7] We can also take these hard thoughts to be represented by the stones, for there follows: *And they will not leave in you one stone upon another.* When an errant mind annexes a still more errant thought to one which is already errant, what is it doing but placing stone upon stone? No stone is left upon another in the destroyed city because when a soul is being led to punishment, everything of that placing together of thoughts is destroyed.

He adds the cause of this suffering: *Because you did not know the time of your visitation.*[10]* Almighty God is accustomed to visiting a wicked soul in many ways. He visits it constantly by his commandments, and sometimes by a scourge, sometimes by a miracle. This is so that it may hear some truth it did not know, and, if still proud and scornful, it may return to him, either pierced with sorrow, or overcome by his kindness and ashamed of the evil it has committed. But since it does not recognize the time of its visitation, at the end of life it is handed over to those enemies with whom the eternal judgment will associate it in perpetual condemnation.

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[7] Ps 146:4 (V 145:4)

It is written: *As you go with your adversary to the magistrate, try to be delivered from him on the way, lest perhaps he hand you over to the judge, and the judge hand you over to the officer, and the officer put you in prison.*[8] 11* Our adversary on the way is God's word, which is contrary to our physical desires in this present life. One who submits humbly to his precepts is delivered from this adversary. Otherwise he will hand him over to the judge, and the judge to the officer. It is on account of the Lord's word which he has despised that a sinner will be held for investigation by the judge as a criminal. The judge will hand him over to the officer, surrendering him to a wicked spirit to carry off to punishment. This spirit demands for chastisement the soul, driven from its body, which willingly complied with it in sinning. The officer puts the soul into prison, because the wicked spirit thrusts it down to hell until the day of judgment comes, after which they will be tormented together in the fires of hell.

When the Lord finished speaking of the destruction of the city, which I have used as a symbol of a perishing soul, *he entered the temple and began to drive out of it those selling and buying.* 12* As God's temple is in the city, so is the life of religious persons among the faithful. It often happens that some assume the appearance of religion, and when they receive holy orders they draw their religious service into trade and worldly business. Those selling in the temple are those who grant for a fee what belongs to certain persons as a right. To sell justice, for instance, is to be engaged in it for profit. Those buying in the temple are those who buy sin when they refuse to give a neighbor his rights, or when they disdain to perform what they owe him if someone pays them not to.

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[8] Lk 12:58

They are told, *My house is a house of prayer, but you have made it a robbers' den.* Sometimes when wicked people hold a religious position, they take life with the sword of malice when they ought to be giving it to their neighbors by their prayers of intercession.[13*] The heart and conscience of the faithful is also the temple and house of God. If it brings forth wicked thoughts, harmful to a neighbor, it is as if robbers dwell in a den and kill those going along blamelessly, plunging their hurtful swords into the guiltless. The heart of the faithful is no longer a house of prayer but a robbers' den when it abandons its state of innocence and blameless holiness and tries to do what it can to harm its neighbors.

Since we are ceaselessly taught by our Redeemer's words, throughout all the holy pages, in opposition to all these kinds of wickedness, he is even now doing what is said in our text: *And he was teaching daily in the temple.* Truth is teaching daily in the temple when he is subtly instructing the hearts of the faithful to avoid evils. But we should be aware that we are truly being instructed by the words of Truth if we fearfully and ceaselessly keep before our eyes our last end, in accord with what a certain wise man said: *In all that you do remember your end, and you will never sin.*[9]

We must ponder daily what we have heard from our Redeemer: . . . *the things that make for your peace on this your day; but now they are hidden from your eyes.* When our strict Judge bears with us, not putting forth his hand to strike us, and while there appears to be a period of time untroubled by thought of recompense and final punishment, we

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9. Si 7:36 (V 7:40)

should consider the evil which is to follow; and while we consider it we should lament; and while we lament we should avoid it. We must keep ceaselessly before our eyes the sins we have committed, and as we keep them before our eyes we must weep over them, and as we weep, we wipe them away. Let us not allow the happiness passing prosperity brings to be our undoing, nor passing things obstruct the eyes of our hearts and lead us thus blinded to the fire. If we carefully weigh this reproach from the mouth of Truth, we recognize what is said to one who is remiss, who does not look into the future: *the things that make for your peace on this your day; but now they are hidden from your eyes.* We should think seriously of how dreadful the hour of our death will be, of our trepidation of mind, of our extensive recollection of all evils, of our forgetfulness of past delights, of our terror in contemplating our judge. What should our delight in present things be, when, as everything else passes away together, what is impending cannot pass away? What we love is utterly ended; and that begins where sorrow never ends? Then will wicked spirits look for their own works in the soul as it goes forth; then will they unfold the evil deeds they persuaded it to commit, so that they can drag it down with them to torment.

But why am I speaking only of evil souls? The wicked spirits may come also to the elect as they depart this life, seeking something of their own in them, if they are strong enough to do so. There was one among all human beings who said freely before his passion: *I will no longer talk much with you; the ruler of this world is coming, and he has no claim on me.*[10] Since the ruler of this world saw him as a mortal human being, he believed he could find something of his own in him. But he who came into the world without sin went forth from the world's corruption without any sin. Peter was found worthy to hear, *Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven too, and whatever you loose on earth*

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[10] Jn 14:30

shall be loosed in heaven too,[11] but he did not presume to say this about himself against the ruler of this world. Neither did Paul,[12] who reached the secret places of the third heaven before he paid death's debt; nor John, who because of his special love reclined on his Redeemer's breast at the supper.[13]

For since the prophet says, *Behold I was conceived in iniquity, and in sin did my mother bring me forth,*[14] no one coming into the world with sin can be sinless. That is why the same prophet says: *No one living shall be considered righteous in your sight;*[15] and Solomon: *There is no righteous man on earth, who does good, and does not sin;*[16] and John: *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us;*[17] and James: *All of us offend in many respects.*[18] We can be sure that the ruler of this world has something of his own in the actions or speech or thought of all those conceived from physical pleasure. But he could neither seize them afterwards nor hold them earlier, since he who was without debt paid death's debt for us. He saved us from paying our debts, so that they would not keep us in the power of our enemy. *The mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,*[19] freely yielded for us what he did not owe. For our sakes he gave the physical death he did not owe to set us free from the spiritual death we did owe. He said *the ruler of this world is coming, and he has no claim on me.*[20] We must be concerned, and reflect daily with many tears, how cruel and dreadful the ruler of this world will be when he comes on the day of our death, seeking his own works in us, if he came also to God in his flesh, and sought something in him, in whom he could find nothing.

What will we say, wretched as we are, what will we who have perpetrated numberless evils do? What do we say to our adversary, as he seeks and finds much of his own in us, but that we have one refuge, one firm hope: we have

[11] Mt 16:19 [12] 2 Co 12:2 [13] Jn 13:23, 25 [14] Ps 51:5 (V 50:7)
[15] Ps 143:2 (V 142:2) [16] Qo 7:21 [17] 1 Jn 1:8
[18] Jm 3:2 [19] 1 Tm 2:5 [20] Jn 14:30

become one with him in whom the ruler of this world sought something of his own and was able to find nothing. He alone is *free among the dead,*[21] and we have been truly set free from subjection to sin because we are united to him who is truly free. It is certain, and we cannot deny it: we have truly to confess that the ruler of this world has much against us, but even so, at the time of our death he is unable to seize us since we have become members of one on whom he has no claim.

But what is our advantage if faith unites us to our Redeemer and our deeds separate us from him? He himself said that *not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven.*[22] We must then unite good works to orthodox faith. Let us wash away the evils we have done by daily weeping. Let our good works, arising out of love of God and neighbor, exceed our past bad ones. Let us not decline to do any good we can do for our brothers and sisters. We do not become members of our Redeemer in any other way than by cleaving to God, and by having compassion on our neighbor.

Since examples often rouse the hearts of one's hearers to love of God and neighbor better than words, I want to report to you a miracle. My child the deacon Epiphanius, who is present with us, and who comes from the province of Isauria, tells it as having occurred in the neighboring territory of Lycaonia. He says that there was a certain monk there of very holy life named Martyrius.[14*] He was making his way from his own monastery to another, of which a spiritual father was in charge, in order to visit him. As he was going along the road he came upon a leper, whose limbs were covered with sores caused by elephantiasis. The leper said that he wanted to return to the place he was staying, but was too exhausted to do so. He indicated that this place was on the road along which the monk Martyrius was hurrying. The man of God pitied the leper's exhaustion, and immediately put the cloak he was wearing on the ground, spread it out, laid the leper upon it, wrapped him in the cloak, raised him upon his shoulders, and carried him along with him.

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[21] Ps 88:5 (V 87:6)　　[22] Mt 7:21

When he was approaching the monastery gates, the spiritual father of the monastery began to call out in a loud voice: 'Hurry, open the monastery gates quickly! Brother Martyrius is coming, carrying the Lord!' As soon as Martyrius reached the gates, the one he thought was a leper leapt down from his shoulders. The God-man, Jesus Christ, Redeemer of the human race, revealed himself in such a way as to be recognized by humans. As Martyrius looked on, he returned to heaven, and said as he was ascending: 'Martyrius, you were not ashamed of me upon earth. I will not be ashamed of you in heaven.' As soon as the holy man entered the monastery, the abbot said to him, 'Martyrius, where is the one you were carrying?' Martyrius answered him, 'If I had known who he was, I would have held on to his feet.' Then he said that when he was carrying him he had not felt his weight at all. This is not to be wondered at. How could he feel the weight of one who was carrying his carrier?

In this we must consider the great value of fraternal compassion, and how closely a merciful heart unites us to almighty God. We draw near to him who is above all things by lowering ourselves through compassion for our neighbor. In physical things we reach the heights by stretching forward; in spiritual matters we can be certain that the further compassion draws us downward, the more truly do we approach the heights. It was not enough for our instruction that the Redeemer of the human race revealed that he was going to say at the final judgment, *Whenever you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.*[23] He had also to manifest this before the judgment in his own person, to point out that anyone who now performs good works for the needy is doing them in a special way for his sake, whose love makes him do them. The less contempt he has for one who appears to be contemptible, the greater will be his recompense.

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[23] Mt 25:40

What body is more sublime than Christ's, which was raised above the angels? What human body is more repulsive than a leper's, with open and swollen wounds which give off a stench? But Christ appeared in the likeness of a leper; he who is to be revered above all did not disdain to be looked down on as below all. Why was this, unless it was to counsel us who are dull in apprehension that anyone hastening to be with him who is in heaven should not refuse to become humble on earth, should not refuse to be compassionate even toward repulsive and contemptible brothers and sisters.

I had decided to speak to you briefly, but because *the way of a man is not in himself*[24] my sermon runs on and cannot be restrained. The one of whom I speak determines it, he who lives and reigns with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.

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24. Jr 10:23

NOTES

1. Homily 39 in Migne (*PL* 1294). There is no indication either in the homily itself or in any of the Gospel books as to the liturgical occasion on which this sermon was delivered.
2. A sentence employed by Bede in his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 346, 2022/25).
3. Three sentences inserted by Bede in his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 347, 2049/56).
4. Seven sentences used by Bede in his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 346, 2027 - 347, 2040).
5. Two more sentences incorporated by Bede in his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 347, 2059/64).
6. Five sentences taken over by Bede for use in his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 347, 2065/75). The first two of these sentences are also to be found in Bede's *Commentary on Mark* (CC 120, 580, 1481/86).

7. Most of the remainder of this paragraph, plus the next two, is to be found in Bede's *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 348, 2077/96).
8. A sentence used by Bede in his *Commentary on the Book of Proverbs* (CC 119B: 137, 36/37)
9. These three paragraphs were introduced by Bede into his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 348, 2097 - 349, 2120).
10. Four sentences introduced by Bede into his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 349, 2121/28).
11. Seven sentences adopted by Bede for use in his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 264, 1306/16).
12. These two paragraphs, plus three sentences of the following paragraph, are to be found in Bede's *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 2129/55).
13. Three sentences also used by Bede in his *Commentary on Mark* (CC 120: 580, 1486/93).
14. This story concerning Martyrius is not included in the *Dialogues.*

homily 40

There was a certain rich man, clothed in purple and fine linen, who feasted sumptuously every day. And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus who laid at his gate, covered with sores, and desired to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table, and no one gave them to him. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came about that the beggar died and was carried by angels into the bosom of Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried in hell. And in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip to end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame.' But Abraham said, 'Son, remember you received good things in during your lifetime and Lazarus, in like manner, evil things; now he is being comforted here and while you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who wish to pass over to you cannot do so, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.' Then he said, 'I beg you, therefore, father, to send Lazarus to my father's house, for I have five brothers, so he can warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.' Abraham said to him, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.' And he said, 'No, my father Abraham; but if some one goes to them from the dead, they will believe.' And he said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they believe one who rises from the dead.'

(Luke 16:19-31)[1]*

In the words of holy Scripture, dearly beloved, we must first attend to the literal truth, and then seek to understand the spiritual allegory. The fruit of the allegory is easily plucked when it is rooted in truth through the literal meaning. But since the allegorical meaning builds up faith, and the literal meaning morals, I who am not speaking to you who believe by God's inspiration, think it appropriate to transpose this normal order. You who already have strong faith should first hear something briefly of the allegorical meaning, and I will keep for the end of my explanation the indispensable moral teaching derived from the literal meaning. Frequently it happens that what is heard last is best remembered. Therefore I will run through the allegorical meaning quickly so as to come more swiftly to the breadth of moral teaching.

There was a certain rich man, clothed in purple and fine linen, who feasted sumptuously every day.[2]* Whom, dearly beloved, does this rich man represent if not the Jews? They had a cultivated life outwardly, and used the advantages of the Law they had received to adorn themselves, not for service. And who does Lazarus, who was covered with sores, symbolize, but the Gentiles? After they had turned to God they were not ashamed to confess their sins, and so the wounds on their skin were only superficial. The poison in a skin wound is drawn from inside and breaks out externally. What is confession of sins but a kind of rupture of the wound, since confession brings the poison of sin, which was harmful when hidden in the heart, out beneficially into the open. Skin wounds draw the corrupt matter to the surface. What are we doing when we confess our sins, but opening up the evil hidden within us?

But Lazarus, the wounded one, *desired to be fed with the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table, and no one gave them to him.* The proud Jews disdained to admit any Gentile to knowledge of the Law. The teaching of the Law was for them a source not of love but of pride; it was as if they were bloated on the riches they had received. Words of knowledge fell down to him like crumbs falling from the table. Moreover dogs licked the poor man's wounds as he lay there. Sometimes in Scripture dogs represent preachers. When a dog licks a wound with its tongue it heals it. When holy teachers give us instruction during the confession of our sins it is as if they are touching the wounds of our hearts with their tongues. When they free us from our sins by speaking to us, it is as if they are restoring our health by touching our wounds.

The name 'dog' indicates a preacher's tongue, and so the psalmist says to the Lord: *The tongues of your dogs lap their portion of your enemies.*[1] [3]* Holy preachers were chosen from among the unbelieving Jews. When they declared the truth, coming out against thieves and robbers, they were barking loudly on the Lord's behalf, if I say so. On the other hand, some are condemned in these words: *They are dumb dogs, and cannot bark.*[2]

Holy preachers condemn sin, but approve of the confession of sins. When they tell us, *Confess your sins to one another, and pray for each other, that you may be healed,*[3] they are dogs licking Lazarus's sores. When holy teachers accept the Gentiles' confessions, they are restoring their hearts' wounds to soundness. 'Lazarus' is rightly interpreted 'helped'.[4]* These teachers help to deliver him when they heal his wounds by their reproof. The licking dogs also suggest the smooth tongues of flatterers. To have flatterers licking our wounds, which they often do, is to have them praise us, and give their wicked approbation to the very evils we disapprove of in ourselves.

[5]*It so happened that both men died. The rich man clothed in purple and fine linen was buried in hell; Lazarus was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. What does Abraham's bosom signify but repose, hidden in the Father? Truth says that *many will come from east and west and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the*

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[1] Ps 68:23 (V 67:24) [2] Is 56:10 [3] Jm 5:16

sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness.[4] One described as clothed in purple is rightly called a son of the kingdom. He lifts up his eyes from afar to see Lazarus, because when unbelievers are in the depth through the punishment brought by their condemnation, they gaze at the believers at rest above them before the day of the last judgment. They are unable to contemplate the joys that will be theirs after the judgment. What they behold is far away, because they do not deserve to reach it.

The rich man reveals the great burning in his tongue when he says: *Send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, since I am tormented in this flame.* The unbelieving people keep the words of the Law in their mouths, but refuse to act on them. The burning will be greater in the place where they manifested that they knew what to do, but that they were unwilling to do it. Solomon said concerning those who are knowledgeable but remiss, *All the toil of a man is in his mouth, but his soul will not be filled.*[5] Whoever labors only for this, to know what he should say, fasts with an empty heart from the nourishment that should provide him with knowledge.

The rich man wishes to be touched with the end of the finger because a person given over to eternal punishment desires to share in even the meanest work of the righteous. He gets the answer that he received good things in this life, since he considered that all his happiness lay in passing good fortune. The righteous too can have good things here, but they cannot receive them as their recompense. As they long for better things, that is eternal ones, they judge whatever good things they have to be of little worth, since they are aflame with holy desires. The prophet David was upheld by the wealth and many honors of his kingdom. Even though he regarded these as necessarily good, yet he burned with longing and desire for one unique good: *For me it is good to cleave to God!*[6]

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[4] Mt 8:11–12 [5] Qo 6:7 [6] Ps 73:28 (V 72:28)

Abraham said to him: *Son, remember...* Abraham calls him son, and yet does not set him free from his torments. The believing ancestors of this unbelieving people were aware that many had turned away from their faith. They were not moved by compassion to take them away from their torments, even though they recognized them as their physical descendants.

The rich man who was in torment related that he had five brothers. The proud Jewish people, who had already been in large part condemned, knew that the successors they had left behind on earth were given over to the five bodily senses. The rich man described those he had left behind by the number five: being relegated to hell, he lamented that they do not ascend to spiritual understanding. He requested that Lazarus be sent to them, and is told that they have Moses and the prophets, But, he says, they will not believe unless someone rises from the dead. At once Abraham answers: *If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they believe one who rises from the dead.* Truth says of Moses: *If you believed Moses you would believe me, for he wrote about me.*[7] Abraham's reply is fulfilled. The Lord rose them the dead, but because the Jews were unwilling to believe Moses, they refused to believe the one who did rise from the dead. When they refused to take Moses's words spiritually, they failed to arrive at the one of whom Moses had spoken.

Let this be enough, dearly beloved. for a summary examination of the mystical meaning of the allegory. Let us now turn back to look more extensively at the moral implications of what occurred. *There was a certain rich man, clothed in purple and fine linen, who feasted sumptuously every day, and there was a certain beggar named Lazarus who lay at the rich man's gate, covered with sores.*

6*Some people consider the commandments of the Old Testament stricter than those of the New, but they are deceived by a short-sighted interpretation. In the former theft, not miserliness, is punished: wrongful taking of property is punished by fourfold restitution.[8] In this place the rich man is not censured for having taken away someone else's property, but for not having given away his own. He is not said to have forcibly wronged anyone, but to have prided himself on what he received. It is principally from this that we must infer what punishment a person will receive who plunders another's property, if one who does not give what is his own is afflicted by punishment in hell. No one should judge himself safe, saying, 'See, I do not seize the property of another, but I enjoy the things lawfully granted me'. The rich man was not punished for taking away another's property but for falling prey to evil after acquiring possessions. This was why he was handed over to the lower world. He was not cautious in his happiness; he used the gifts that he had acquired to feed his pride; he was ignorant of the essentials of kindness; he refused to make amends for his sins, even when the opportunity was available to him.

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[7] Jn 5:46

[7]*There are some who do not consider attention to fine and costly clothing a sin. But if it were not, God's word would not be so precise in stating that the rich man who was tormented in hell had been clothed in fine linen and purple. No one looks for remarkable clothes except out of vainglory, to appear more worthy of respect than others. That no one want to put on expensive clothing where he cannot be seen by others testifies that costly clothing is only sought out of vainglory. We are also better able to conclude that this is a sin from the contrary fact that if the disrepute that comes from cheap clothing were not a virtue the evangelist would not have said so precisely of John the Baptist that *he wore a garment made of camel's hair.*[9]

We must take special note of Truth's descriptions of the proud rich man and the humble poor man: *There was a*

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[8] Ex 22:1, Lv 6:5, 2 S 12:6

[9] Mt 3:4

certain rich man; And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus. Among human beings, rich men's names are more likely to be known than poor men's. Why is it that when the Lord is speaking of a poor man and a rich one, he mentions the poor man's name, but not the name of the rich man? Is it not that God knows and favors the humble, but has no knowledge of the proud?[10] Hence at the last judgment he is going to say to those proud of their miraculous powers: *I do not know whence you are; depart from me all you workers of iniquity.*[11] And on the other hand, he told Moses: *I know you by name.*[12] And so he calls the rich man, 'A certain man', but the poor man 'a needy man named Lazarus', as if saying, 'I know the poor and humble man; the proud and rich man I do not know. I acknowledge the former through my favor; I have no knowledge of the latter because I have judged and rejected him.'

We must also consider with what great care our Creator arranges all things. A single happening does not occur for one reason only.[8*] The beggar Lazarus lies at the rich man's gate covered with sores. The Lord makes two points with this one circumstance. The rich man might have had some excuse if Lazarus, poor and covered with sores as he was, had not lain at his door, if he had been some distance away, if his need had not been distressing in the rich man's sight. Again, if the rich man had been out of the sight of the poor man who was covered with sores, the poor man's temptation would have been less severe. But when in one incident the Lord situated the man who was poor and covered with sores at the gate of the man who was rich and plentifully provided with delights, he indicated at once the massive condemnation that awaited the pitiless rich man as a result of his seeing the poor one, and his approval of the poor man who was tempted daily by seeing the rich one.

How great do you think the temptations were that this man, needy and beset with sores, bore in his heart? He was in need of bread, and did not have even his health: before him he beheld a rich man, healthy and enjoying his pleasures. He saw himself afflicted with pain and cold, and the other enjoying fine linen and purple clothing; himself burdened with sores, the other abounding in possessions; himself in need, the other unwilling to give him anything.[9]* How great do you consider the agitation in the poor man's heart was, dearly beloved, these temptations caused? His poverty could have brought him enough pain even if he had been well. Again, his illness would have been enough even if he had had help. But to test the poor man more fully, poverty and illness together wore him down. Moreover he saw the rich man making his way surrounded by throngs of attentive followers, while he was visited by no one in his illness and need. The dogs who were free to lick his wounds are evidence that there was no one there to visit him.

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[10] Ps 138:6 (V 137:6) [11] Mt 7:23 [12] Ex 33:12

From one incident almighty God makes two judgments: he allowed the poor man, Lazarus, to lie at the rich man's gate, in order that the undutiful rich man might increase his condemnation and punishment, and the poor man who was tempted might increase his reward. The rich man looked every day on one he did not pity; the poor man saw one who was putting him to the test. There were two hearts here on earth: One looked down on them from above, preparing the poor man for glory by tempting him, and the rich man for punishment by bearing with him. For there follows: *And it came about that Lazarus died and was carried by the angel to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried in hell.*

The rich man, who refused to have pity on Lazarus in this life, seeks his intercession from his state of pain. For *in his torment he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus in his bosom. Calling out he said: Father Abraham, have pity on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, since I am tormented in this flame.*[10]* How keen are God's judgments! How strictly does he repay our good and evil actions! It was said earlier that in this life Lazarus sought the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table, and no one gave them to him. Now it is said that the rich man in his state of pain was eagerly longing to have some water trickle into his mouth from the end of Lazarus' finger. From this, my friends, draw a conclusion on God's strictness and severity. From his place in hell the rich man, who had been unwilling to give even a little bit from his table to the wounded poor man, came seeking a little bit: one who had denied a crumb of bread sought a drop of water.

We should particularly notice why the rich man in the flames asked to have his tongue cooled. Holy Scripture sometimes says one thing, and implies another by the same words. The Lord did not say earlier that the proud rich man was given to talkativeness, but told of his excessive banqueting. He said nothing of his talkativeness, but that he had sinned with pride, and from miserliness and gluttony. But since talkativeness is prevalent at banquets, he who is said here to have banqueted wickedly is shown in hell feeling the fire more severely in his tongue. The first sin attendant on those who banquet wickedly is talkativeness, and after talkativeness comes frivolous amusement. Holy Scripture testifies that amusement follows gluttony when it says: *The people sat down to eat and drink, and got up to amuse themselves.*[13] But before the body is moved to amusement, the tongue is moved to levity and empty words. What is implied when the rich man in torment asks that his tongue be cooled, except that he who sinned more at his banquets through talkativeness felt as his just recompense the fire more fiercely in his tongue?

We must ponder Abraham's answer: *Son, remember that you received good things in your lifetime, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; now he is being comforted here, while you are in agony.* That sentence, dearly beloved, requires anxious hearing more than explanation. If any of you has received some external good in this world, you ought to be very much frightened of it, if I may say so. It may have been given you in return for your good actions; the judge who is paying you in this life with external goods may deprive you of your recompense in interior ones; honors and riches here may be not an aid to virtue but repayment for your work.[11*] The words, *you received good things in your lifetime,* indicate that the rich man had some good thing for which he received a return in good things in this life; again, when Lazarus is said to have received evil things it is shown that he had some evil thing which was to be cleansed away. The fire of poverty cleansed Lazarus of his evil deeds, and the happiness of this passing life rewarded the good deeds of the rich man. Poverty afflicted the former and wiped him clean; wealth rewarded the latter and deprived him of everything else.

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[13] Ex 32:6

Whoever you are who are well off in this world, whenever you recollect that you have received good for your good deeds, be afraid lest the prosperity granted you may be your reward. Whenever you see poor persons daily committing blameworthy deeds, do not look down on them, do not despair of them: the furnace of poverty may be cleansing away the stain of superficial wickedness. You must fear for yourselves, because a prosperous life may even follow upon evil deeds. You must be solicitous for the poor, because poverty is a teacher afflicting their lives until it leads them to uprightness.

And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who wish to pass over to you cannot do so, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.[12*] Here we must particularly ask why it is said that those who wish to pass over to you cannot do so. There is no doubt that those in hell desire to pass over to the condition of the blessed, but how can we say that those who have already received the condition of blessedness want to pass over to those who are tormented in hell? Just as the condemned desire to pass over to the elect, to leave the place where their sufferings afflict them, so it is in the hearts of the righteous to pass over to those who are ill-treated and in torment, to go to them in mercy, to want to set them free. But those who want to pass over from the abode of the blessed to the ill-treated and tormented cannot do so. Although the souls of the righteous possess mercy in the goodness of their natures, they are bound by their Creator's great rectitude, united with their own righteousness, so that they cannot be moved by compassion for the condemned. They are of one mind with the Judge, to whom they cleave. They do not condescend out of mercy to those they cannot rescue, because as they behold them rejected by the Creator they love, they see them far removed from themselves. The unrighteous do not pass over to the condition of the blessed because they are bound by an everlasting condemnation; the righteous are unable to pass over to the condemned because they have been raised up by the righteousness of the judgment and feel no pity for them out of compassion.

After the rich man in the flames has had his hope for himself taken away, his mind turns to the relatives he has left behind. Sometimes, though unprofitably for themselves, the hearts of the condemned are instructed in love by their punishment. Then these people, who failed to love themselves when they loved sin in this present life, come to have spiritual love for their relatives. And so the rich man says: *I beg you, therefore, father, to send Lazarus to my father's house, for I have five brothers, so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.*[13]* We should notice how much suffering is heaped upon the rich man in the flames. Both recognition and memory are preserved for his punishment. He recognizes Lazarus, whom he had despised; he remembers his brothers, whom he has left behind. Vengeance for the poor man would not have been complete unless the rich man recognized him receiving his recompense; and the punishment in flame would not have been complete without his fearing that his own sufferings would come upon his relatives too.

So that sinners may be punished more as they suffer, they see the glory of those they despised; and the punishment of those they loved to no avail also torments them. We must believe that before they receive their recompense at the final judgment, the unrighteous behold some of the righteous at rest. This is so that when they see them in their joy, they may be tormented not only by their own suffering but also by the good the others have received.

The righteous always observe the unrighteous in their torment, to increase their own joy, since they look upon the evil they have mercifully escaped. Their thankfulness to the One who saved them is greater, the more they see in others what they would have suffered if they had been left to themselves. Nor does the punishment of the condemned which they see dim the brightness of the happiness they experience. Where there is no longer any compassion for their agony, it will surely not be able to lessen the gladness of the blessed. But what is there to wonder at if the righteous feel joy when they see the torments of the unrighteous? In a painting do we not use the color black as a background so that we can see white and red more clearly? And although their own joys fully satisfy them, there is no doubt that they are always looking on the evils of the condemned. For those who see the brightness of their Creator, there is nothing going on among created things which they cannot see.

Abraham immediately responds to the rich man's request that Lazarus be sent to his brothers: *They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.*[14*] But the rich man who had disdained the words of God did not judge that those coming after him would be able to hear them, and so he answered: *No, my father; but if some one goes to them from the dead, they will believe.* He received a true answer: *If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they believe one who rises from the dead.* It will be much harder for those who disdained the words of the Law to fulfill the commandments of our Redeemer, who rose from the dead, because they are more exacting. What is said by the Law is less exacting than what is commanded by the Lord. The Law prescribed the giving of a tithe,[14] but our Redeemer ordered those who would follow the way of perfection to give up everything.[15] The Law suppressed physical sins,[16] but our Redeemer condemned even unlawful thoughts.[17] And so *If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they believe one who rises form the dead.* When will those who neglect to fulfill the less important commandments of the Law be strong enough to obey our Saviour's more demanding precepts?[15*] It is surely clear that they refused to believe him whose sayings they decline to fulfill. Let what I have said suffice for my reflection upon this event.

Now that you perceive the repose of Lazarus and the punishment of the rich man, dearly beloved, behave shrewdly. Seek intercessors for your sins. Look to the poor to be your advocates on the day of judgment. At present you have many Lazaruses. They lie at your gate, and are in need of what daily falls from your table when you have been satisfied. The words of the reading must instruct us in fulfilling the holy precepts. Every day we find a Lazarus, if we seek him; every day we see a Lazarus, even if we do not seek him. The poor persist in being present. Those who beg of us may later come as intercessors for us. It is we who ought to beg, and yet they beg from us. Consider whether we ought to deny what they ask, when it is our defenders who are asking! Do not squander the time of mercy, do not neglect the assistance you have received.

Think about suffering before it comes to you. When you see any abject persons in this world, even if their deeds seem blameworthy do not look down upon them. Perhaps the medicine of poverty will cure those wounded by weakness of character. If there are any things that must be justifiably censured in such persons, they can, if you wish it, increase your reward. Then their vices bring about an increase of holiness in you. When you give bread, and a word as well,

[14] Lv 27:30-33 [15] Lk 18:22 [16] Ex 20:14 [17] Mt 5:28

the bread of refection with a word of rebuke, the person who asked one kind of sustenance from you receives two. His outer self is satisfied with food, and his inner self with a message.

Therefore when we see a poor person who needs reproof, we must counsel him and not despise him. If he has nothing to reprove, we must honor him as an intercessor. But we see many people of whose merits we are unaware. Therefore we must honor them all, and you must humble yourself before everyone, inasmuch as you do not know who among them may be Christ.

Here is something, my friends, which my brother and fellow-priest Speciosus[16]* who is present knows well. At the time he entered the monastery, a certain old woman named Redempta, who had received the habit of a nun, was dwelling in this city near the church of the blessed ever-virgin Mary. She had been a disciple of that Erundo who was noted for her great virtues, and was reported to have lived as a hermit on the hills of Praeneste. Two other religious women, wearing the same habit, lived with Redempta, one named Romula, and another who still survives, whom I know by sight but whose name I do not know.

These three women lived together in one dwelling, and led a life which was rich indeed in regard to religious practices, but poor in regard to possessions. Romula, whom I have mentioned, surpassed her fellow-religious by the great merit of her life. She was a person of wonderful patience and perfect obedience; she carefully observed silence and strove diligently for continual prayer.

Frequently those we human beings judge to be already perfect still have some imperfection in the eyes of the supreme Artist. Similarly, we who are unskilled often observe carvers of small figures, and, even though they have not been completed, we praise their figures as if they were already perfect. The artisan continues to scrutinize and polish them: he hears them being praised, but does not cease hammering and perfecting them. So Romula, whom I have mentioned, was struck with a physical affliction which doctors call by its Greek name, paralysis. She was confined to her bed for many years, and lay there almost entirely deprived of the use of her members. Still her sufferings did not make her impatient. The damage to her body became for her a means to increase in virtue. The less strength she had for anything else, the stronger grew her attachment to the practice of prayer.

One night she called Redempta, who cared for her two disciples as if they were her own daughters, saying: 'Mother, come! Mother, come!' She rose quickly, with the other disciple—this became known from its being recounted by the two of them, and many others; I learned of it at the same time. When they were there at her bedside in the middle of the night, suddenly a light from heaven filled the entire cell. Such a great brightness shone forth that it touched the hearts of those present with inexplicable fear, and, as they afterwards told, their entire bodies became rigid and remained in a sudden state of insensibility. They began to hear a sound, as if a great multitude was entering in, and the door of the cell began to shake as if a crowd of people was pressing against it as they entered. They said that they felt the multitude of those entering, but because their fear and the light were so great they were unable to see anything. Their fear had closed their eyes, and the brightness of the light blinded them. A wonderful fragrance accompanied the light, and its sweetness restored their minds which the light had overawed.

As they were unable to bear the strength of the brightness, Romula began to comfort her mistress in their way of life, Redempta, who was there trembling, saying in a soothing voice: 'Mother, do not be afraid; I am not going to die now.' As soon as she had said this, the light was gradually withdrawn, but the fragrance that accompanied it remained. A second and a third day passed, and the sweet fragrance that had been spread about remained. On the fourth night she again called her mistress. When she came, Romula asked for the viaticum and received it. Neither Redempta nor the other disciple left her bedside. Suddenly in the area before her cell door two choirs stood singing psalms. From their voices they described the sex of those singing the psalms as both men and women singing antiphonally. As the heavenly funeral rites were being performed outside the door of her cell, Romula's holy soul was released from its body. As it was led into heaven, the choirs of those who were singing the psalms rose higher and the psalmody grew softer, until both the sound of the psalmody and the prolonged fragrance ended.

Who honored this woman while she lived? She appeared unworthy, and everyone looked down upon her. Who condescended to come near her, to see her? But in that dungheap lay hidden a pearl of God. I call this corruptible body a dungheap, my friends; I speak of the disrepute that comes from poverty as a dungheap. The pearl which lay in the dungheap was taken up and placed among the adornments of the heavenly king, now to shine forth among the citizens on high, gleaming among the fiery stones of the eternal crown. You who are rich in this world, or who believe yourselves to be rich, compare, if you can, your false riches with Romula's true riches! You are going to lose everything you possess along the road of this world; she sought nothing on her journey, and found everything when she reached her goal. You lead a happy life and fear a sad death; she endured a sad life and came to a happy death. You seek to have for a time the homage of other humans; she was despised by other humans and found choirs of angels as her companions.

Learn, my friends, to look down upon all temporal things, learn to reject ephemeral honors and to love eternal glory. Honor the poor you see; consider that those you see the world outwardly despising are within themselves friends of God. Share your possessions with them, so that finally they may deign to share what they have with you. Reflect on what the Teacher of the Gentiles says: *Let your abundance* *at the present time supply their want, so that their abundance may supply your want.*[18] Reflect on what Truth himself said: *As you did it for one of the least of these my brothers, you did it for me.*[19] Why are you slow to make a gift? What you offer to a person lying on the earth you are giving to One sitting in heaven. May almighty God, who is addressing these things to your ears through me, himself address them to your hearts, he who lives and reigns with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.

18. 2 Co 8:14 19. Mt 25:40

NOTES

1. Homily 40 in Migne (*PL* 1302). The Gospel pericope Lk 16:1-31 is marked in Bu to be used for any daily liturgical celebration, in Wu to be used on Friday of the fourth week after the feast of Saints Peter and Paul (June 29). In early Roman liturgical practice the Sundays between Pentecost and Advent were not numbered consecutively, but were counted until the feast of Saints Peter and Paul, and then reckoned anew after this until the feast of Saint Lawrence (August 10). The homily itself gives no indication of the occasion on which this Gospel passage may have been read.
2. The first part of this paragraph, except for one sentence, and the next paragraph were inserted by Bede in his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 305, 393 - 306, 416).
3. An obscure psalm verse, which the *Jerusalem Bible* considers an allusion to the deaths of Ahab, Jehoram, and Jezebel.
4. A derivation of a Hebrew word taken over by Gregory from Saint Jerome's *Interpretation of Hebrew Names* (CC 72: 140, 7).
5. This paragraph and the following four—with the omission of the four sentences in the latter—are contained in Bede's *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 306, 416 - 307, 461).
6. Five sentences which have been incorporated by Bede in his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 302, 253/61).
7. Another paragaraph, with the omission of a single sentence towards the beginning, that has been inserted by Bede in his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 302, 261 - 303, 285).
8. Five more sentences incorporated by Bede in his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 303, 288/98).
9. Another seven sentences employed by Bede in his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 303, 298/308).

10. The remainder of this paragraph, minus a few short sentences here and there, was introduced by Bede into his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 304, 319/34).
11. Two sentences used by Bede in his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 304, 337/42).
12. The four sentences at the beginning of this paragraph and the four sentences at its end have been taken over by Bede for use in his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 304, 345 - 305, 362).
13. Two more paragraphs, along with the first three sentences of the following one, but again with the omission of a few sentences towards the end, to be found in Bede's *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 305, 365/82).
14. Three sentences incorporated by Bede in his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 305, 384/91).
15. A single sentence inserted by Bede in his *Commentary on Luke* (CC 120: 305, 391/92).
16. This story is repeated almost word for word in Gregory's *Dialogues* 4:15.

scriptural abbreviations used in footnotes

Ac	Acts of the Apostles
Am	Amos
Col	Colossians
Dn	Daniel
Dt	Deuteronomy
Eph	Ephesians
Ex	Exodus
Ezk	Ezekiel
Ga	Galatians
Gn	Genesis
Hab	Habbakuk
Heb	Hebrews
Hg	Haggai
Ho	Hosea
Is	Isaiah
Jb	Job
Jg	Judges
Jl	Joel
Jm	James
Jn	John
Jos	Joshua
Jr	Jeremiah
Lk	Luke
Lm	Lamentations
Lv	Leviticus
LXX	Septuagint
Mi	Micah
Mk	Mark
Ml	Malachi
Mt	Matthew
Nb	Numbers
Ph	Philemon
Pr	Proverbs
Ps	Psalms
Qo	Qoheleth (Ecclesiastes)
Rm	Romans
Rt	Ruth
Rv	Revelation (Apocalypse)
Si	Sirach (Ecclesiasticus)
Tb	Tobit
Tt	Titus
V	Vulgate
Ws	Wisdom
Zc	Zechariah
Zp	Zephaniah
1 Co	First Corinthians
1 Tm	First Timothy
1 P	First Peter
1 Jn	First John
1 S	First Samuel
1 K	First Kings
1 Th	First Thessalonians
2 K	Second Kings
2 Co	Second Corinthians
2 S	Second Samuel
3 Jn	Third John

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